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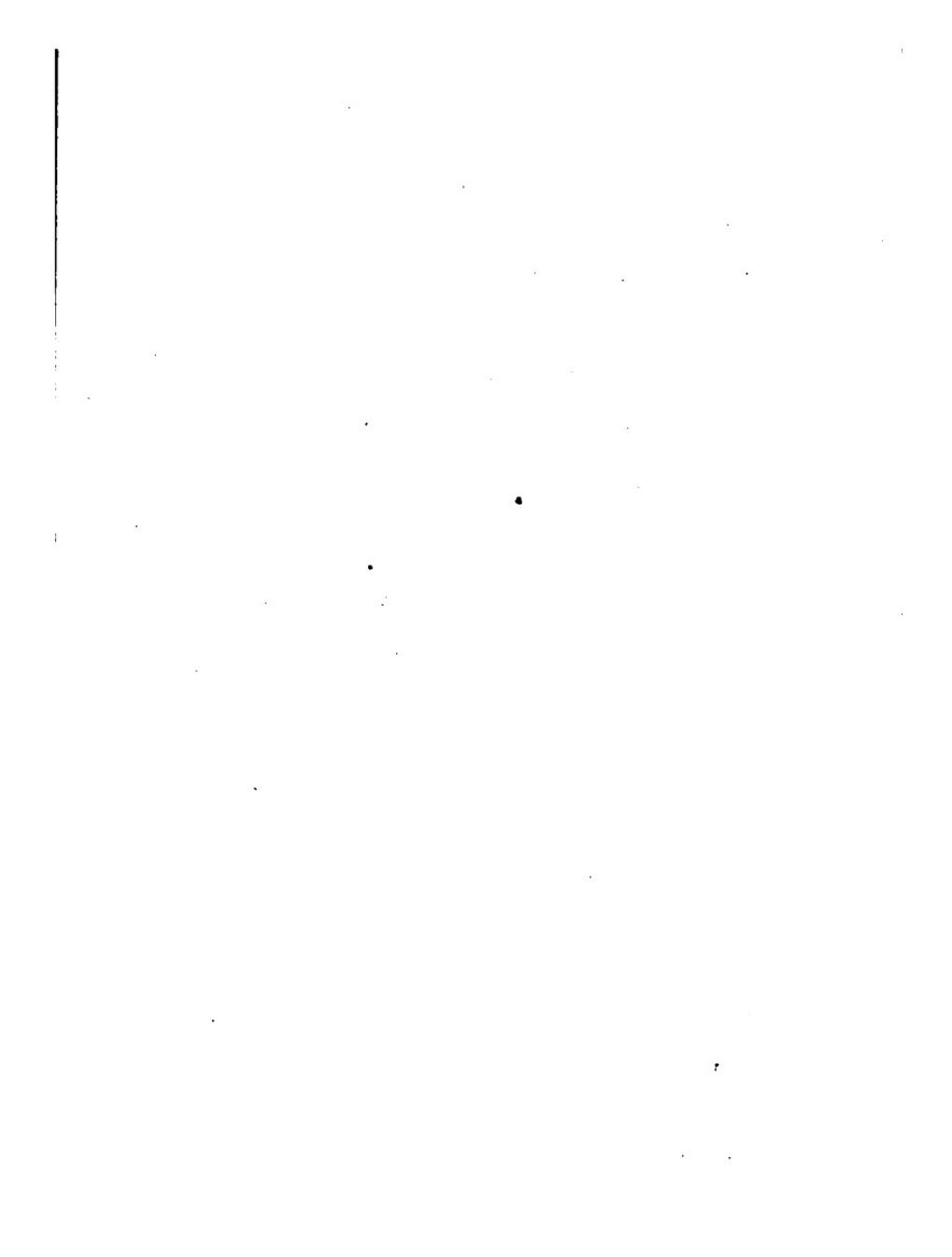
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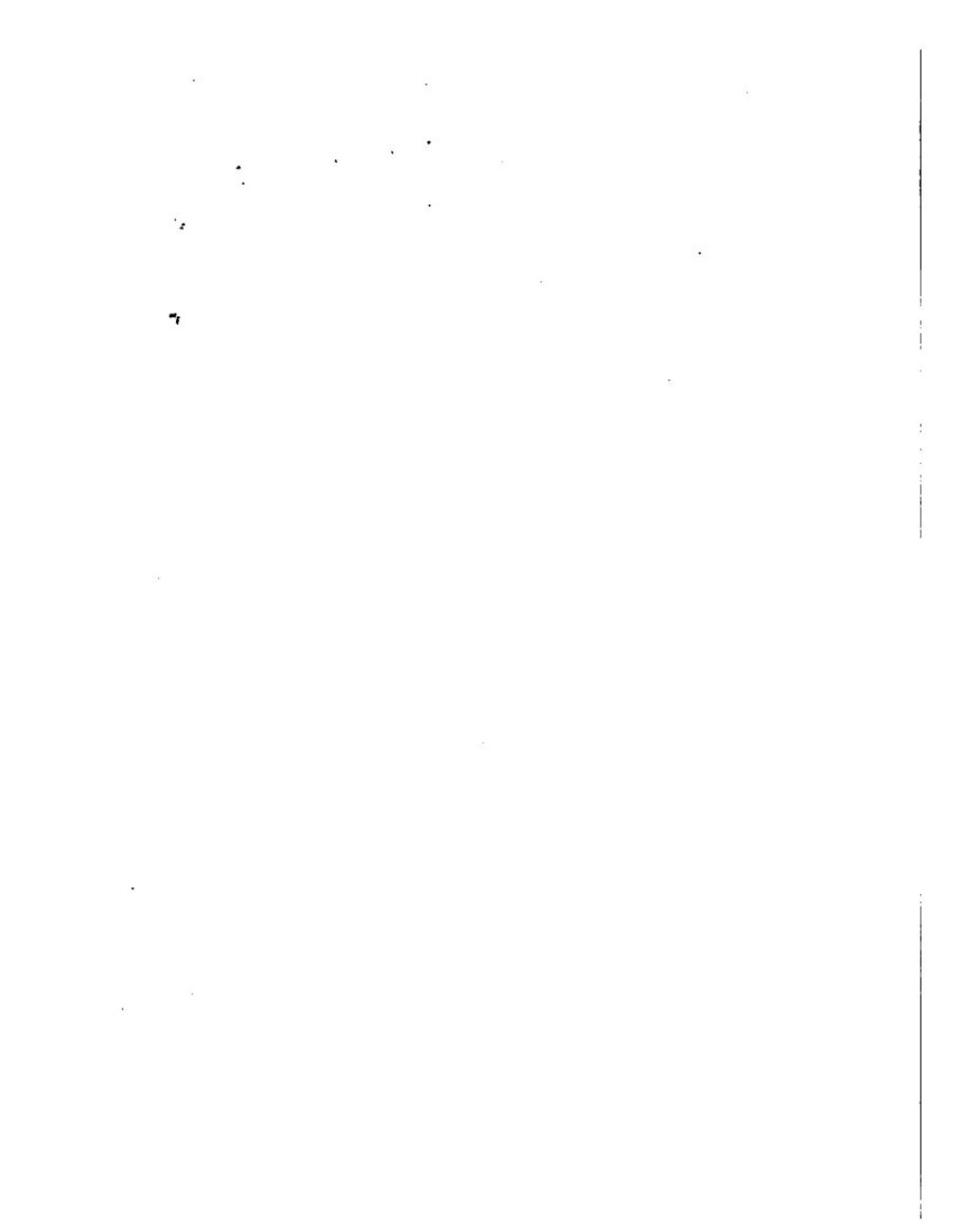
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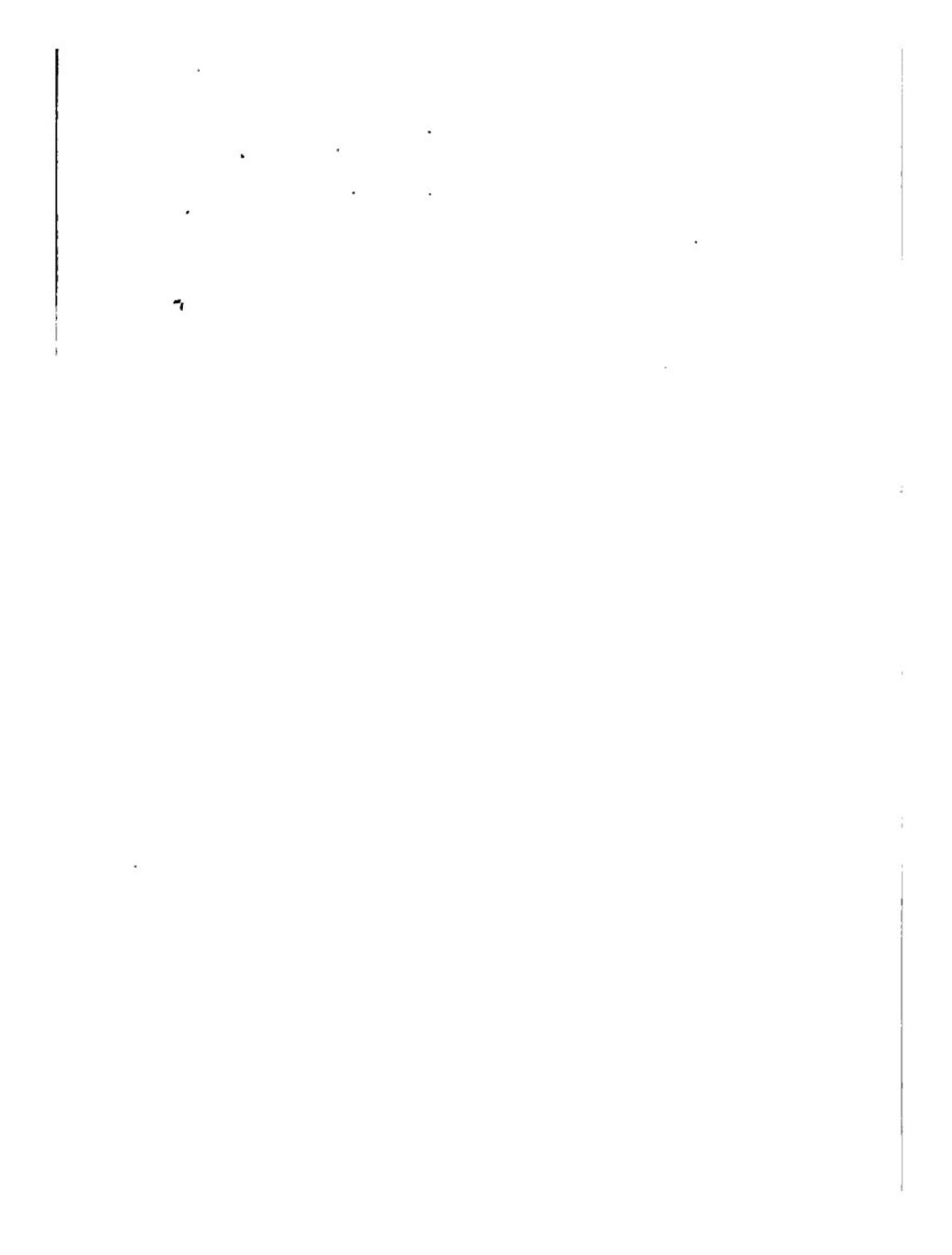




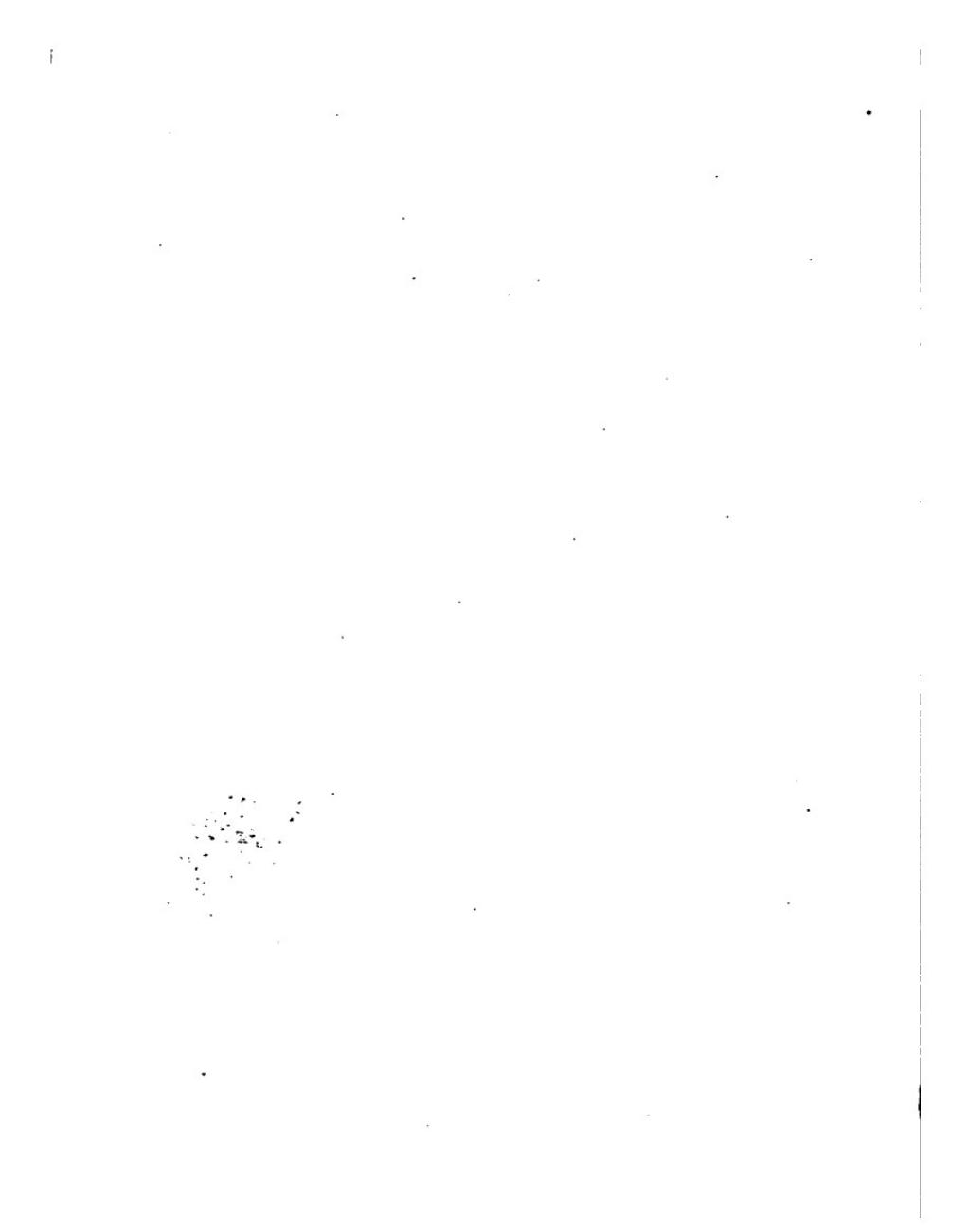




HEAVEN'S WHISPERS IN THE STORM.



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BY THE LATE

REV. FRANCIS J. JAMESON, M.A.,
Rector of Coton.

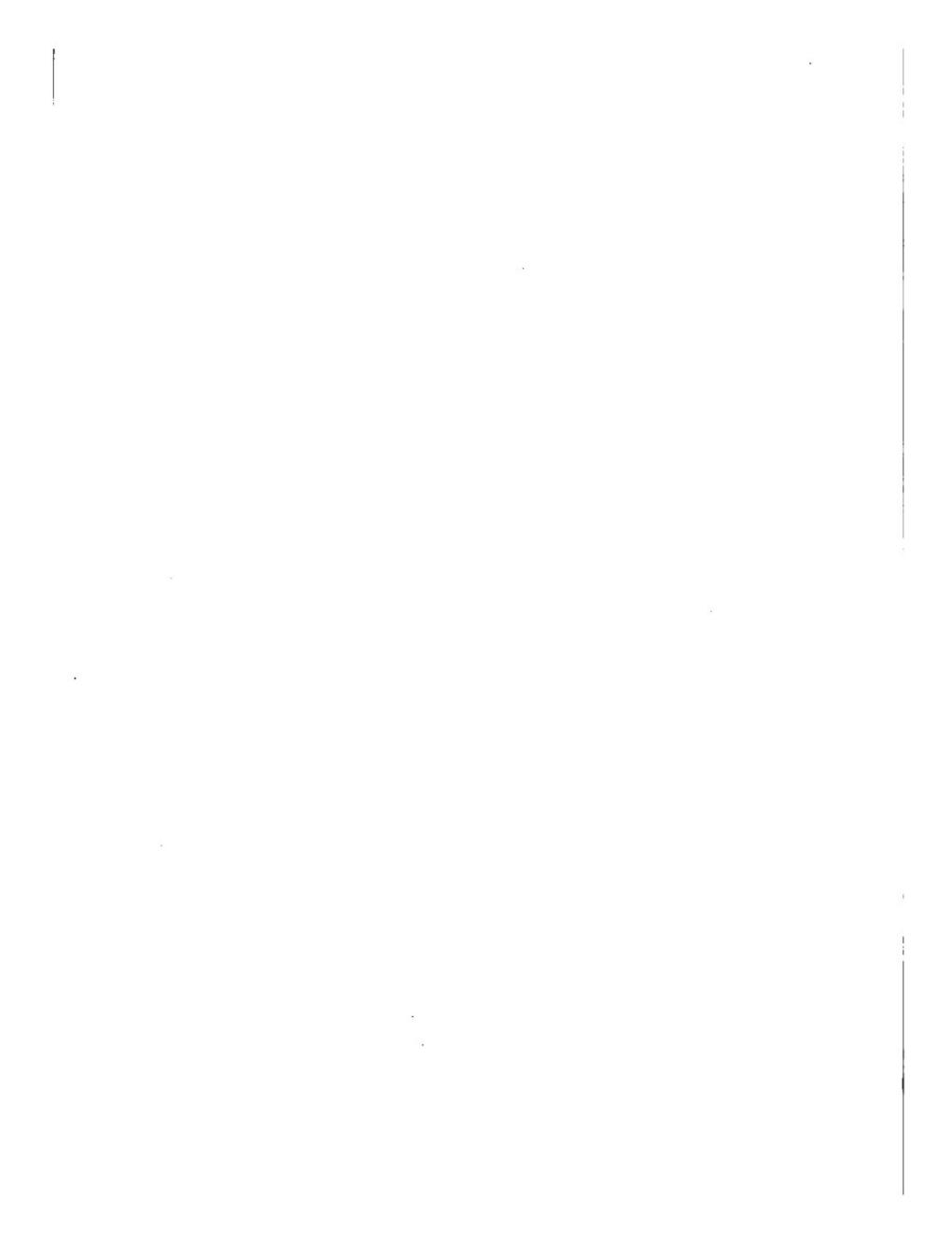
(With a Memoir of the Author.)



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Contents.

Memoir of the Author -	-	-	ix.
I. Why am I thus ? -	-	-	1
II. Work for the hands which hang down	-	-	7
III. The soul silent before God	-	-	14
IV. Times of visitation	-	-	25
V. The stability of trust	-	-	36
VI. God manifesting Himself in sorrow	-	-	51
VII. The disappointed prayer	-	-	63
VIII. God's fettered workman	-	-	77
IX. The heart's home	-	-	92
X. The coming Bridegroom	-	-	106

4

Memoir of the Author.

THE little work here offered to the public was composed by its Author during the later stages of the lingering illness which brought him to an early grave. It was partly printed before he died, and he took an interest to the last in its progress through the press. The object which he contemplated in writing it is sufficiently explained by his brief Preface :—

“The following pages are offered, by one who for some time has been laid by through illness from active work, to those who are in similar circumstances. The subjects of the chapters have been chosen as suitable either for cheering or instructing the hearts whom God is chastening.”

When, however, his death made it necessary that the publication of his work should be completed by other hands, it was thought desirable to add to this brief Preface a short Memoir of the Author. It is hoped that such an addition may prove acceptable, not only to Mr. Jameson's numerous friends, but to the general reader, by enabling him more fully to understand and appreciate the chapters which follow.

Francis James Jameson was the second son of Robert Francis Jameson, of Trinity College, Cambridge, and of the Inner Temple, Barrister at Law, who was appointed, in 1819, one of the judges at the Havannah, under the Treaties with Spain for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. He was born at Hampstead, on the 13th of September, 1828, and brought up at Reading, where his family resided. In consequence of his father's dislike to public schools, he was educated entirely at home by private tutors.

As a boy he exhibited the same traits of character which afterwards adorned him as a man. He was "kind, deep-feeling, and thoughtful;" and from an early age gave proofs of genuine piety. He has been heard to say that he did not remember the time when he was not under the influence of religion. Perfect truthfulness, conscientiousness, and firm faith and trust in the promises of God, were his chief characteristics from childhood.

In October, 1846, shortly after the completion of his eighteenth year, he entered upon University life, as a member of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. His under-graduate course was a happy example of the combination of a diligent and conscientious pursuit of the appointed line of study, with a keen enjoyment of the many advantages and privileges which a great University affords. "They were happy days," writes a college friend and contemporary,

when we were together at Caius. There was such a very delightful circle of friends. Alas, what gaps are being constantly made in it! What I owe to that intercourse it is impossible to tell. Well do I remember him in those days : his simplicity, his conscientious devotion to duty, his quiet gentle piety, his friendliness and sociability."

Another college friend writes : "Mr. Jameson was always the same devout and earnest Christian, from the time of his entering College as in his later years, and always the same warmly attached friend. He had the disadvantage of coming up to College without the preparation of school life. This made him shy and strange on first coming to Cambridge, but his companions soon found out his kindly nature ; and his knowledge and judgment carried weight with us even then. I should say he was distinguished from the first by a high sense of honour, and that his life

was pure and blameless in the highest degree. I look back upon his friendship as one of the brightest points in my University life."

At College, Mr. Jameson soon became distinguished by his talent for mathematics, and on proceeding to his degree of B.A., in January, 1850, he gained high honours in the mathematical tripos. He was bracketed with Mr. Westlake, of Trinity College, as sixth wrangler.

In March, 1852, he was elected a Fellow of Caius College; and in June of the same year he entered upon the Curacy, with sole charge, of the parish of the Holy Sepulchre, in the town of Cambridge. In the same year he obtained the Norrision Prize in the University for the best essay on a theological subject. Three years later, in June, 1855, he removed to St. Catharine's College, where he had been appointed Fellow and Assistant Tutor, and where he subsequently became Tutor and

President. For the ten years of his life as a resident Fellow, at Caius and St. Catharine's, he was actively engaged in college and private tuition. He also accepted the office of Pro-Proctor in the University, but resigned it before his year of tenure was completed. His conduct on that occasion showed that he could be firm and unflinching where he felt that principle was at stake; and that the gentleness, and courtesy, and consideration for the feelings and opinions of others, for which he was conspicuous, were always combined in him with a high sense of duty and of honour.

In 1861 the Mastership of his College (St. Catharine's) became vacant, by the promotion of Dr. Philpott to the See of Worcester. Mr. Jameson was put forward for the post, but was not elected. The disappointment was attended with circumstances of aggravation, but he bore it in a spirit of Christian resignation and forbear-

ance. A warm and generous friend, he was one in whom the heart of his friend could repose with the utmost confidence. But his high and almost chivalrous sense of honour and great delicacy of feeling disqualified him, perhaps, in a measure for grappling successfully with the practical business of life.

It was, however, in connection with his parish that what was probably the chief work of these ten years passed in Cambridge was accomplished. As a pastor Mr. Jameson was assiduous in his ministrations, and won in a rare degree the affection and respect of his flock. Though for nearly seven years before he died his ministerial connection with them had ceased, he was held in kindly remembrance to the last by his former parishioners, and the intelligence of his death was received by them with a common feeling of profound regret.

As a preacher Mr. Jameson was much

valued.* Many of the junior members of the University were in the habit of attending his Church, especially at the Sunday evening service which he established. Some who read these pages will perhaps recall the scene presented by the Round Church, on a Sunday evening in full term. The beautiful architecture of the building, brought out in strong relief by the gas light ; the devout and orderly service ; the well rendered congregational singing (for in Church music Mr. Jameson had considerable taste and knowledge) ; the elegant but earnest Gospel sermon, listened to by an attentive congregation, comprising a goodly number of gowns-men, for whom accommodation was with difficulty found in the circular vestibule and in other parts of the Church. By not a few, these services will

* A few of his sermons were printed : "Brotherly Coun-sels to Students : Four Sermons preached in St. Catharine's College Chapel." "Life's Work : Two Sermons preached before the University of Cambridge."

be looked back upon with humble gratitude for spiritual benefits received. By not a few, though the preacher's voice is now hushed in death, the deathless truths which they heard from his lips are being still proclaimed.

In 1862 Mr. Jameson married Alicia Anne, daughter of the Rev. Walter Burton Leach, of Wadham College, Oxford, Rector of Sutton Montis, and Vicar of Chilthorne Domer, Somerset. At the same time he became Rector of the small living of Coton, in the neighbourhood of Cambridge, to which he was appointed by his College. In that quiet sphere he laboured diligently and successfully for between four and five years, combining private tuition with pastoral work. But in the beginning of the year 1867 symptoms of what proved to be constitutional disease of the lungs developed themselves, and Mr. Jameson was ordered by his medical attendants to proceed, without delay,

to Ventnor, in the Isle of Wight. The following summer was spent at Westbury-on-Trym, in the neighbourhood of Clifton; and towards the close of the year he removed to Bournemouth, where the brief remainder of his life was passed.

During the earlier stages of his illness hopes were entertained that he would ultimately be restored to a measure of health and strength, and that his life would be spared to his family and the Church. It was not till a short time before he died that he himself regarded his case as hopeless. But throughout he left himself unreservedly in the hands of Him, whom he had long known and trusted as his Father and his Friend. Not a murmur escaped his lips. He was not only calm and peaceful, but cheerful and happy; enjoying heartily, so far as his strength allowed, the society of his family and friends, and entering intelligently into questions of literary or public interest. He verified

to the full the Prophet's assurance: "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.*" He shared the Apostle's earnest expectation and hope, that *in nothing he should be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death.*

But the following pages afford the best insight into the state of Mr. Jameson's mind during his illness. It is impossible to read them without feeling that the writer is speaking to us out of the fulness of his own experience. They show us that their author had come to know, as he himself expresses it, "*the deep joy resulting from a clear view of God's way of peace,*" and that this was the solid foundation of all his comfort and happiness. They show us the victory of faith over the trials of a lot like his,—trials which were fully realized and keenly

felt, but in which he was more than conqueror through Him that loved him. May his words, enforced by his example, be comforting and profitable to many souls !

Towards the commencement of the present year Mr. Jameson began to sink very rapidly. His end was perfect peace. Without a pang and without a struggle he expired, on Saturday, February 6th, 1869, in the arms of his wife, whom he leaves with three young children to deplore their loss. In a secluded corner of the beautiful cemetery attached to the parish Church at Bournemouth, his remains were committed to the ground, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Servant of God, well done,
Rest from thy loved employ;
The battle fought, the victory won,
Enter thy Master's joy.

March, 1869.

HEAVEN'S WHISPERS IN THE STORM.

I.

WHY AM I THUS?

"Shew me wherefore Thou contendest with me."—JOB x. 2.

WHEN a public catastrophe occurs, as soon as the endeavour has been made to remedy the immediate effects of the disaster, the question is asked on all hands, "What was the cause?" A similar inquiry very naturally rises in our minds when we suddenly find ourselves thrown into any kind of trouble. We shall do well to meet that question, and to sift it thoroughly. I am not so much alluding to immediate causes, which are outwardly discernible, although these

ought by no means to be passed over. Our act of negligence, or perhaps of culpable neglect, our wilful carelessness of the laws of health, our perverse refusal to listen to the advice of others, or, it may be, our indulgence in habits that we knew were wrong,—these God means us to note and ponder on as actions that we had no right to trifle with, and which have brought with them their own punishment. But there are causes that lie still deeper than these; and often there is no immediate external cause to which a calamity which may have come upon us can be traced. Has my heavenly Father (this is the question for us to ask ourselves) had any special reason for sending this trial upon me? God does sometimes note down in His book of remembrance the sin of the past: and then, after a time, and with no seeming link of connection between cause and effect, calls the guilty one to a reckoning. So apparently conscience told the mother in Zarephath it was with her, when in the agony of her grief over

her dead child she cried out to God's prophet, "Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" So the guilt of Naboth's murder followed Ahab till the blood of the murderer, wounded by the random arrow, stained the very spot where the blood of his victim had been spilt. So the offence of Moses and Aaron by the rock was not forgotten when Israel's hosts were full of joy at the prospect of crossing the Jordan: amid the general rejoicings, the leader and the high priest were forbidden to go over and tread the goodly land. These instances give us a solemn warning that the mere lapse of time does not obliterate the guilt of old sins; and if there be some that we have not repented of,—sins of many years ago,—sins carelessly committed and carelessly forgotten, God may be at this moment calling us to account. May we so listen to the Voice which seems to speak to us in accents of judgment, that we may hear it change its tone, and whisper to us, "Thy sins be forgiven thee."

But it is by no means necessarily the case that this should be the meaning of any trial under which we may be suffering. Christ Himself teaches us not to make this mistake. "Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered such things?" His words, in answer to His disciples' question relative to a blind man, indicate a grander purpose than mere punishment, in some of the trials of life: "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Such a purpose may lie at the root of the visitation which is perhaps pressing on the reader of these pages; if so, that visitation, heavy though it seems, is a high privilege granted thee. God is making you an instrument for the manifestation of His works. Is there not happiness in this thought? The cross that you bear, oh, will it not seem all the lighter, when you see in it a means of bringing glory to the Master you love! Do you ask, What are these "works of God"

which can be manifested in your suffering? I answer, that it may be a part of His working to waken others out of carelessness and security, by the sight of a brother struck down into adversity. Or He may be purposing to make the sufferer's patience and calm trust a means of convincing some unbelieving heart that there is reality and vitality in the Christian's hope. Or God's "work" which is being carried out in your trial, my sorrowing brother or sister, may be the development in your own self of the image of your Saviour, the carrying out of that process by which you may be made meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Ah, happy sorrows, if they are indeed a part of a reconciled Father's covenant mercy to His child! He has said regarding His vineyard, "I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day;" and when He prunes its vines or takes away their old supports, when He plucks up and burns the plants therein that He knows

to be poisonous, when He makes His north wind to blow over it as well as His south wind, He is but giving instances of the watchful care of which this promise is the pledge. This, then, may be your confidence, Christian sufferer, if you are willing submissively to follow Him who "guides thee with His eye,"—the eye that sees further than you can see, and discerns the safest path. God is very near to you ; His strong right hand is holding you ; He is loving you with a special love ; He is stooping over you with all a husband's tender joy. To you it may be said, as to Zion of old, "Fear thou not : let not thy hands be faint. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; He will save ; He will rejoice over thee with joy ; He will silently plan * (for thee) in His love ; He will joy over thee with singing."

* Such, I am inclined to think, is the full force of the passage translated in our authorized version : "He will rest in His love" (ZEPH. iii. 17) : the two root-meanings of *silence* and *planning* being here combined in the Hebrew verb.

II.

WORK FOR THE HANDS WHICH HANG DOWN.

"Lift up the hands which hang down."—HEB. xii. 12.

ONE of the anxieties which weigh upon the heart in a time of feeble health arises from the impossibility of engaging in active work. This is not so much, of course, a trouble to the man who by great pain or prostration of mind and body is naturally withdrawn from the scenes around him, but rather to one who, while incapacitated for ordinary employment by injury to limb, loss of voice, or general delicacy of health, is yet not prevented from taking an interest in current events. It is sad, in such case, to look out on all those stirring activities which, in the eyes of an intelligent and Christian man, give a zest

and a value to life, and to have to say, "I can take no share in them." You see many a servant of God toiling laboriously in His vineyard, while you feel to be standing outside, only grasping a broken spade. You hear the cries of human hearts craving for living water, but you have no power to rush into the midst of them with the bowl filled from the Fountain. "Alas," you say, "mine is a useless life. I can do nothing for God, nothing for my fellow-man." But pause a moment before you come to this conclusion. Let God's treatment of one of His distinguished servants of old lead you to a deeper and happier view of your position. Have you noticed how remarkable and different from what we might have considered probable, was the training of Moses for that which was the great work of his life, Israel's deliverance and guidance, and the communication to them of God's Law? His life of 120 years was characterized by division into three distinct equal periods. During the first forty years he was at Pharaoh's court,

treated as one of the chief princes of the land. What more golden opportunity could have been given him for carrying out the purpose that was lurking all the while in his heart, of delivering Israel from slavery? So doubtless he thought himself, when on more than one occasion he sought to exercise his authority in defence of the oppressed. But these attempts to do God's work proved futile. They did but result in Moses' flight from his position of seeming advantage, and his having to remain for the next forty years of his life in helpless banishment in Midian. Possibly as those years advanced, the idea which had glowed in his bosom in earlier days, that he should be the liberator of his captive countrymen, had grown fainter and fainter; and yet, when traders or travellers as they passed through the desert told the story of Israel's hard bondage, how his heart must have chafed at the tale of a woe that he longed, but was all powerless, to soften! Were those forty years a wasted time, a mere blank in Moses'

life? This period of being set aside and cut off from opportunities of fulfilling the purpose so dear to him, was undoubtedly an important part of his training. That training was brought to a close when the Voice from the burning bush summoned the humbled and disciplined servant to begin, at God's time and in God's way, that which was his true life's work, though it occupied but the last third of his time on earth.

It may be, my brother, that this your season of incapacity for work is a counterpart of Moses' forty years of exile in Midian. It may be God is making it to you a time of deep and secret training,—a time of drawing you into nearer contact with heaven than you had ever known in days of activity and excitement,—a time for hearing, in the hush of outward work, more clearly than you ever heard before, the Saviour's voice saying to your soul, "I am thy salvation." There may perhaps be a time of happy labour for God yet in store for you when this your training is complete. But if not, still it will have

been well worth while to have been held back, disappointed though you may have felt, from undertakings that you longed to join in, and to have been obliged to stand and look on, with silent voice and hands hanging down, while the great tide of work for the world's good and for Christ's honour was rolling past,—if only this be the result of your sojourning in the desert, that God, "the God of thy fathers," becomes specially manifested to you in the brightness and warmth of a love that, once kindled, is never quenched.

At the same time it is wonderful in how many little ways,—ways, we should rather say, which seem little to us, but which become great through the results that God brings out of them,—an invalid may be actively useful. In some cases, his writings may speak when his voice cannot: or the word spoken in unmistakeable sympathy by the sufferer to a fellow sufferer may be the means of winning a soul for Christ, or of cheering a downcast Christian heart.

Among the persons who are brought into contact with an invalid, whether as attendants on his wants, or as sympathizing friends, an influence may be exerted which may have a power for good little expected. Many who would be deaf to the exhortations of what they would consider merely professional lips, are won to seriousness by the sight of cheerful acquiescence in God's discipline, and of a religion that brightens under trial. We might add that correspondence by letters, provided judgment and common sense are combined with the desire to do good, may prove a valuable instrument of usefulness in the hands of those who are prevented from mixing in the busy world.

But, after all, there is a meaning which we do well to observe, and a lesson which we must not fail to learn, in our being withdrawn from direct work for God. Does it not bring home to us of how little value all our labours in reality are? The cessation of them makes no difference to the progress of God's mighty

working. The steady fulfilling of His purposes goes on just the same; and while we are made to stand aside from the arena where the grand development of His kingdom is taking place, we are shown how easily God can do without us, and that our most earnest efforts are but as so many drops to the ocean. On the advance of that kingdom let our thoughts centre. It shall triumph, with us or without us. Then, Lord, do with me what Thou wilt: use Thy servant just as Thou seest best. Only let me behold the glory of Thy perfected work, when the stone cut out without poor feeble human hands shall have broken to pieces the dominion of sin and misery, and shall become a great mountain filling the whole earth!

III.

THE SOUL SILENT BEFORE GOD.

*"Truly my soul is silent towards God."**—PSALM Ixii. 1.

"**THERE** was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." So wrote St. John, as scenes of the heavenly temple were made to pass before him. That silence no doubt partly indicated the hush of expectation, as the seven angels were preparing to sound their trumpets, and to usher in a series of solemn and momentous events. But was there not a further significance in it? The Apostle had just seen the great multitude gathered from all nations, standing before God's throne in all the joy and

* Such is the stricter rendering of the verse, translated in both the Bible and Prayer-book version,—“Truly my soul waiteth upon God.” Literally the passage is, “My soul is silence towards God.”

triumph of the salvation granted them through the blood of the Lamb. With a loud voice they had rendered praise to Him from whom the bliss that now was theirs had come ; and in mighty chorus the angels, who had watched and rejoiced over the repentance of each of those ransomed ones, had joined their voices with theirs : "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Then that mighty sound ceased ; and veiled was every angel's face, and bowed low was every ransomed one's head, as solemn stillness reigned through heaven's vast temple. It was a moment of deeper praise: that multitude was worshipping with more intense adoration, when, as the Apostle listened, "there was silence in heaven."

There is a kind of worship on earth similar to that silent adoration in the realms of light. The natural and usual means of man's approach

to God is in the use of words, either whispered in secret or uttered in concert with a company of worshippers ; but there are times when no words can express the feelings of the heart. We may get such a view of our own sinfulness and unworthiness as may make us speechless before God ; and we feel that we can but cast ourselves down at our Father's feet and mentally point to our one source of hope on Calvary. Or when we meditate on all that God is, there may come upon us an overpowering sense of the majesty of Him in whose presence we are standing. We may, in some moment of deeper and more realizing faith, seem, with Isaiah, to behold Jehovah's throne, and round it the Seraphim veiling their faces and veiling their feet ; or we may catch a glimpse of St. John's vision of the glorified Son of Man : His eyes as a flame of fire, and His voice as the sound of many waters. At such a time will any words of adoration express all we feel ? Shall we be disposed, when His glory seems thus awfully

shining around us, to lift up our voice and chant even the noblest anthem composed in His honour? Rather, I think, our worship in that hour will be a speechless worship; and the Psalmist's words will best express the nature of our adoration: "Truly my soul is silent towards God."

But we come closer to the Psalmist's meaning if we regard these words as expressive of the calm resignation of a heart surrounded by trials, but which knows where its refuge is to be found. As he sees armies of malicious enemies gathering against him, seeking to break him down "as a bowing wall and a tottering fence," while each earthly refuge seemed to fail, no cry of anxiety, no utterance of dismay escapes him: he can rest in silent trust upon his God. "Truly my soul is silent towards God: from Him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence: I shall not be greatly moved." Perhaps the highest stage of Christian experience is that in which faith can so realize

the guiding, guardian love that surrounds us, as to be unalarmed and unmoved by anything that happens. The higher the Alpine traveller climbs, the less he feels the sudden atmospheric changes, the damp vapours and the stormy gusts of the lower passes ; and there is a point, if he can but reach it, from which he can look down on the thick clouds, and even on the raging thunder storm, with the calm blue of heaven above him.* There is an eminence corresponding to this in the spiritual life at which we ought to aim, and which I believe it is possible for us to attain. In the lower stages of religious experience we look around us at this or that threatening evil, and tremble lest it may attack us. We bring many requests to God about ourselves, and anxiously urge them at His mercy-seat ; and when some of them are denied us, we despairingly think that something is going wrong with us. Always anxious to have a hand

* M. Arago, in his "Meteorological Essays," describes such a scene as witnessed from a mountain summit.

in all that concerns us, we are "careful and troubled about many things." But a greater advance in Divine things will show us a happy resting-place, like Mary's of Bethany, at the feet of Jesus: a stage of deeper trust, in which we become willing to leave every circumstance that may affect us to our Father's wisdom, fearless (even though we may feel them) of the "terror by night," the "arrow that flieth by day," the "pestilence that walketh in darkness," and the "destruction that wasteth at noonday," because we are conscious that He "covers us with His feathers." Thus trusting, we shall, I think, leave behind us many of our care-born prayers; and feeling that we live in the presence of One who never forgets us, and who knows all our wants, we shall simply look upward and be "silent towards God."

And I think that in the matter of one's personal salvation something of the same kind is the true attitude of the soul before God. There are those who tell us that in laborious duties, in

frequenting constant religious services, or in an organized system of self-denial, we must toil on at the task of bringing ourselves into favour with God. Glad as we ever ought to be, and glad as we ever shall be if the true principle actuates us, to spend ourselves in works of usefulness, to attend often God's house, and exercise whatever self-denial to which our Lord may call us, it is but poor slavish work (setting aside its hopelessness) to do all this as a means of climbing to a justified condition. If we regard in this light our moral and religious duties, there cannot possibly be any calm resting upon God ; we must always be anxiously vexing ourselves lest our performances of duty should fall short of what we suppose is the proper mark. Or, if we flatter ourselves we have done our best, the Lord's words must wither up all our hopes : "When ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants." Contrast with this the happy freedom of spirit which comes from realizing the true ground of our justification

before God. "No more a servant, but a son," becomes the motto of such a state. When Christ is felt to have made a blessed exchange with us,—He taking on Himself all our sins, and giving to us His righteousness,—when, still more, we realize that He has linked us to Himself in so close a union that he that toucheth us toucheth the apple of His eye,—how changed become our feelings with regard to the duties and the difficulties of the Christian life! There is no more the constant fretting and worrying ourselves in the effort to satisfy a Taskmaster. Love to our Father will make us eager to live to His praise, and will cause us to grieve over our perpetual failures. But, rising paramount above all, will be the conviction that we (our whole selves, with all our struggles, our successes, our failures) are in His hand. "He has done, and will do all for me. As He nailed to the cross of His dear Son the handwriting that contained every charge against me arising out of my countless sins, so He will not fail (has

He not promised His Spirit for this very end ?) to help and direct my every effort to serve Him. The more I trust Him, the more sure I may be that He will not forsake the work of His own hands,—that He will perfect that which concerns me. To Him, then, I leave my heart's all. In quietness and confidence shall be my strength. Truly my soul is silent towards God."

If this little book should fall into the hands of one whose life is felt to be drawing towards its close, let me point out to such an one the deep joy resulting from a clear view of God's way of peace. What, dear reader, is the past, on which you are now looking back, but a wreck of unfulfilled purposes, duties but half accomplished, good deeds marred by low motives, to say nothing of the catalogue of actual sins? How distressing, how harassing a message you would feel it to be, when any active effort is now impossible; if I could say nothing else to you in God's name, but " You must make amends for the past." Nor would you, I am sure, feel that

you had got all you wanted, if I could say, "You have done a great deal of good in your former life, and you have always been spoken of as a man of uprightness and honour." But when the message brought to you is this,—that you may be quite sure God has been loving you all through your life, and has followed you to this moment, in order that you may realize, by the faith which He demands of His intelligent creatures, the free and perfect restoration to Himself offered to you in the Saviour's work,—when you are told that in accepting God's revelation of love in the cross, you may become one with Christ, so one with Him that your guilty self becomes crucified with Him, and His Divine righteousness becomes yours,—when you thus find that the sins, yes, and the poor defective righteousnesses of the past, may all be swallowed up in the fulness of the pardon which Jesus has purchased,—then how peacefully, my brother, may you rest in the hour of nature's last weakness, if you close with these offers of Divine

goodness! Calm in the feeling that He in whom you have believed is able to keep what you have committed unto Him against the great day, you can lie passively at your Father's feet, your heart at rest, your soul silent before Him.

IV.

TIMES OF VISITATION.

"Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."—LUKE xix. 44.

THE scene of Christ weeping over Jerusalem is not only one of the most touching, but one of the most suggestive scenes in our Lord's life. We do not only see there the beautiful spectacle of the gentle Jesus melting into tears, as there burst on His sight from the ridge of Olivet the view of the city which He had loved, but which had returned His love with hatred,—the city whither, He knew, He was going to die. It was, if I may so say, in emblem, a spectacle stereotyped for all ages, where may be seen in all time the Saviour gazing, with a sorrow that has its springs in heaven's deepest love, on a soul on which have shone the sweet and roseate beams

of His mercy, but which has loved darkness rather than light; where too we hear told by Christ's own authoritative voice, the grounds on which any one misses the mercy and inherits the woe. "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: BECAUSE thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

The hour when Jesus trod her soil (so He told impenitent Judah),—the hour when His voice was heard in the midst of her,—the hour when His hand was stretched out to touch her lepers, to lift up her lame ones, to open the eyes of her blind,—was the "time of her visitation." *Then* the Lord of love had come on a special errand of goodness to her. Then was her favoured opportunity,—an opportunity such as comes

once, but which being neglected comes not again. Then she might have bent at the feet of her King, and given in her allegiance to Him who sought to rule her with a sceptre of loving-kindness,—then she might have taken His hand, and suffered Him to draw her to His side,—then she might have brought her children to Him, and asked Him to gather them in safety, “as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing.” But here was her folly and her sin: she knew not the time of her visitation. She did not recognize its meaning and its blessedness. She let it slip past, uncared for, and unheeded. And *therefore*,—not because her people were then specially wicked, not because she had been breaking God’s law or profaning His temple,—but simply “because she knew not the time of her visitation,” the woes came upon her foretold, by prophets’ lips ages back,—the things belonging to her peace hid from her eyes, her house left unto her desolate, and herself laid even with the ground, and her children within her!

There are "times of visitation" in our case, the seizing of which, as they flit past us on swift wings, makes all the difference in our eternal destiny. What are they, and when do they come to us?

It will strike us all that *life*,—the entire period while a man can think, and pray, and act,—is a "time of visitation." When first it dawned upon us, it came to us as a precious gift from Him who has made each living man to be a bearer of His image, a possessor of the glorious privilege of free-will. It was as if God said to each of us, "I commit to thee the keys of my own treasure-house. Take thou authority to use and dispense the rich stores of creation which I now place under thy command: they are thine for a while; yet remember that they are only thine *in trust*; see that thou use them for thy Creator's honour, and for thine own welfare." Or it is as if God had marked out for us a field of definite extent, and had placed us there to dig out of the soil beneath our feet some precious metal;

and every year, yes, every hour, that passes by narrows the limit of that field. Alas, how often is the boundary allowed to go on narrowing, while outside the gold is left still lying untouched, that should and that might have been dug out to God's glory and our own good! Youth comes, and the opportunity is gone of learning the foundation lessons of life. Manhood comes, and the opportunity is gone of doing the peculiar, enthusiastic work for which the freshness and vigour of youth are adapted. Old age comes, and then the opportunity is gone of offering to God the sacrifice of life's steady and continuous toil. The work of each period of life must be done, and can only be done, in that period. Childhood, youth, manhood, have each their special and peculiar responsibilities and duties. It is not even the earnest activity of manhood that can make up for years of youth that have been trifled away; nor is it the late repentance of the worn-out sinner, when hoary hairs are upon him, that will make up for the

lost opportunities of a life-time. Every hour of our life has its meaning,—a meaning pointing forwards to heaven's eternity.

But He who watches us with the same eyes that wept those loving tears over Jerusalem, sees how hard we find it to keep constantly in mind the deep and solemn meaning of this life of ours, which seems such a common, every-day thing. He knows that, amid the routine of daily work and the ordinary occurrences about us, we are apt to forget that each moment that passes by is a precious fragment of our heavenly Father's "time of visitation." Accordingly, in the course of our life, He marks out certain periods which shall be to us specially and unmistakably "times of visitation."

Reader, you whose forced freedom from the world's activities gives you the opportunity of looking calmly into the past, let this season of being in the wilderness waken in you memories of the visitations that may have come to you ere now. Was there never a moment when

the dead, sluggish current of your feelings and thoughts seemed suddenly and perhaps unaccountably to be arrested: when the familiar world around you seemed for the instant to retreat into the back-ground, and the breath of another world seemed to fan your spirit,—a world where you felt that God was, and whose mysterious whispers seemed to find a response in your trembling heart? It may have been on some occasion when, tired with your day's work, you sat down to rest, and were glad to throw off for once the care and worry of business thoughts. In such a case you would ordinarily have sought recreation in the pleasant conversation of friends; but on this occasion you were alone: you were thrown on your own resources for getting relief from the thoughts of anxious work. Ah, whence came that shade of solemn feeling that spread itself over you? What made you sigh as you looked back on all the eager labour which had hitherto been filling your thoughts, and say, like Solomon in the midst

of the glory of his palace, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"? How was it that, with a sense of reality you had never experienced before, you put it before yourself that *you*,—your own living self,—had something to do with the unseen world, with the state whither your dead friends were gone, and in which you had always been taught to believe there is a heaven and a hell? Whence came that uninvited thought of what a bar your sins were in the way of making God your Friend, and of being able to look into the future hopefully? And what made your heart throb with a longing wish that the familiar name of the Saviour were something more to you than a name: that you could attain that privilege, which you believed some others did possess, of being able to rest with all your weight of sins, and cares, and fears, on the strong arm of that Saviour? *That* was a moment when God had come very near. Jesus was standing at the door of your heart, and He was knocking and asking for admission there.

What was the result of this whisper of grace ? Alas, perhaps when the next morning dawned you went forth to your business with all your accustomed worldliness ; the holy impressions of the silent hour had all vanished and gone ; and there was heard at the right hand of the heavenly throne the Mediator's sigh : "Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Take, again, a general survey of your life past. Have you not had given to you Sabbath days, and holy services, and countless opportunities of mingling with God's worshippers, and thus of catching somewhat of heavenly warmth through the influence of the communion of saints ? Can you recall the Confirmation day, or the day of first coming to the Table of the Lord ? Was not each of these a season that stands out in the whole period of life's hourly privileges, marked by more urgent mercy on God's part, by closer approaches of the Saviour's footsteps ? The question for you, as you look back on these seasons is, "Did I recognize them as times of

visitation? Did I turn them to account by learning therein the things belonging to my peace?"

Or has God's hand never made itself felt by you: laid upon your property, emptying by some sudden blow your treasures which you had long laboured to fill,—laid upon one dearer to you than all treasures of gold or silver, robbing your heart of its tenderest joy, and making the once smiling house desolate and dark,—laid upon your person, casting you on a bed of suffering, and bringing you very near to the grave? Ah, this is just what He is doing to you *now*. This retrospect has brought you up to the passing moment. Blessed thought! this very hour is a time of visitation! Your Father is near you with outstretched hands, ready to bless, as soon as you cry to Him with the Prodigal's repentance, "Father, I have sinned against Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child." Christ has come to you, telling you once again of the weight He bore for you as the sacrificed

Lamb of God. The Holy Spirit is hovering over you, wakening in you each desire you feel to be freed from sin, and waiting to take possession of you in the name of Him who bought you for Himself. May the moment not be lost, that comes to you laden with such glorious mercies! May there be revealed in it to you all the sweetness and all the power of Him who wept over Jerusalem!

V.

THE STABILITY OF TRUST.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."—PSALM CXXV. 1.

HAPPY is the eye that can look round on all the common objects that are about it, and see in them all tokens of sacred things. Happy is the gazer on creation, to whom creation seems like a mirror of the Almighty's love, and who can discern, wherever he goes, types of "the things that eye hath not seen." This linking together the things of an unseen world with the common things of the world of sight, is a power which depends on the man's own moral state. There must be a knowledge of the higher things : the eye of faith must have been accustomed to look on them, and have got familiar with them, ere

it can recognize suggestive images of them in the visible objects of every-day life. A person who cannot read may gaze at the page of a book, but he will gather from it none of the thoughts represented there. One who is uninstructed in music may look at the score of some piece, but it suggests to him none of the harmonies which are written down there. Perhaps also there is a natural temper of mind, in some more than others, which enables them to see beneath the mere outward form of the objects they look at, and to read in them a deeper and spiritual meaning. To such the world of the external seems to be full of emblems and shadows of a higher world. They look upon it as we may sometimes look upon the still lake on a summer's night, when in its calm, deep bosom we can see images of the stars that are shining far above us.

The pious Jew of old, full of the glow of poetry that marks the Eastern mind, was specially given to reading in the commonest objects

about him thoughts connected with the God of his race, and with the heaven where He dwelt. The objects especially of his own loved land seemed to him to point to sacred ideas. As he surveyed its scenery, or passed throughout it from place to place, each spot seemed to have a power of raising him up to contemplations of holy things. We have a beautiful instance of this in the above passage. In reading it we need to throw ourselves into the position of the ancient Israelite. By him Jerusalem was looked upon as the perpetual city. Jehovah had said of it, "Thy gates are continually before Me." There, doubtless he thought, she must stand when the great cities of other lands have been laid in heaps, and when the owls and satyrs of the desert have taken up their dwelling in the formerly peopled realms; yes, Mount Zion shall abide unmoved, and her towers and pinnacles adorn "the mountain of holiness," the joy of the whole earth, till generations cease. Such, I fancy, was the glowing idea of the Jew in

olden time; and when his was the heart of the “Israelite indeed,” in which the love of Jehovah was found, a further thought rose up in him. While that Mount Zion, as he gazed at it from some neighbouring eminence, seemed to him the very pledge of his nation’s stability, of the perpetuity of Jerusalem’s glory, he felt that even such stability, such perpetuity of blessing and peace, would be the portion not only of God’s chosen nation, but also of each single servant of God: yes, even of the feeblest and humblest of those that made Him the object of their confidence. “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever.”

Although the simile which the Israelite used loses its force in our case, still the truth founded on the simile is as precious to us as it was to the Jew.

Stability,—stability of feeling and of hope,—is a thing of which the poor heart of fallen man deeply feels the want. Amid the daily circum-

stances of life,—its changes, its anxieties, its perplexities, I suppose there is no one who has not felt something of the restlessness, the sense of heaving unsettledness, to which the heart is liable. The things that happen to us, the lights and shadows that fall upon our path,—what an effect they have upon us! The joy that we feel at one moment may break down in face of a single untoward circumstance. We lose our grasp of something on which we had been leaning and depending for our happiness; and then the heart seems all at sea, feels as if it had lost its anchor, and could only drift from wave to wave. So, too, how much a sense of instability comes in when we contemplate the aspect of the world in which we live. Its every feature bears on it the mark of decay. Its firmest objects, even the proudest mountains, we are conscious will one day be moved out of their place. Then, how the moral aspect of the world suggests thoughts of uncertainty and insecurity. We see evil reigning around: Satan having

somehow gained a power therein. We see dark mysterious scenes that *seem* to belie faith's glorious charter, "God is love." We see the hope that perhaps had been rising up of earth's regeneration, crushed at once by the coming to light of some terrible, undeniable fact,—the fond expectation that human nature was becoming reformed, dissipated by some savage outbreak of the sinful heart's hideousness. We see the dream of civilization, the prophetic anticipation of universal peace, vanish at the lifting of the finger of a single tyrant, and become quenched in a flood of carnage. We see, even when the light of a free salvation for fallen man has shone forth, sinners still groping after what their hearts tell them they want, doubting whether that light is indeed from heaven, questioning whether it is enough for man, and whether some new light must not be sought,—some electric lamp, as it were, discovered by modern genius, which will yet reveal the secrets of the world. There is many

a thoughtful person who has felt the effect of all this upon himself, whose footing has trembled amid the throes of the earthquakes around him ; and it may be even that, in that moment, a mournful fear has crept over him, lest what he had always clung to as realities might only be mere shadows of the night. And have there not been times when somewhat of the same feeling has risen up in the matters that concern one's own soul ? Reader, do you sometimes look forward into your probable prospects for the world to come, and does the thought creep in of the possibility of your being self-deceived, and of finding yourself at last beggared and houseless in the day when the need will be felt of a house for eternity ? You have some hope, but it is not a sure and steadfast one ; it is not as an anchor of the soul, which cast out far in advance of your ship, is fixed at the bottom of the smooth waters of the heavenly harbour. You feel the necessity of securing some home in the everlasting world ; but the

building that you are raising seems shaking and insecure, in danger of falling when the first breath of eternity's storm blows upon it.

What then can give us stability of heart,—stability in the changes of life, stability in the contemplation of the perplexing mysteries of the world about us, stability of hope in the prospect of our own entrance among the scenes of a strange and awful world? The Psalmist's words suggest the answer. The source of the needed stability is simple, child-like trust in our heavenly Father. But then this trust must not be mistaken for a feeling which some persons boast they possess: a vague repose in the idea that God will somehow make everything come right. We have the real trust when we have our hearts, if I may so say, rooted in God, *just as He has revealed Himself to us.* The trust that is to be of any use to us, must be that reposed in a God to whom we have been reconciled by Christ's atonement: in One whose presence can become familiar and dear to us,

because it has been opened to us by the sprinkled blood of a loving Saviour.

I. In the varying circumstances of life we shall find it to be that trust which can take away our heart's restlessness. Have we not all had our times of special anxiety, times when the future looked perplexing, times when all our coming life depended on a momentary exercise of our judgment and will, times when the path before us took two directions, and it was left us to choose which we should follow, times too when we have waited for what seemed the deciding of all our happiness,—the decision depending not on ourselves, but on some event beyond our control,—times when our heart's hope was just trembling in the balance, and we had to stand in painful expectation to see the portion reserved for us, either of disappointment or of joy? There is great consolation at such times, in being able to refer our difficulties and anxieties to the Friend that "sticketh closer than a brother;" in falling

back upon the thought, "He knows the emergency in which I am placed,—He can guide my judgment, where all depends on my right exercise of it ; He can dispose and turn the current of events over which I have no control, and cause them to be all for my welfare." Happy it is to be able to realize that His hand is behind the scenes,—that it will order all things just as shall ultimately turn out for the best,—that it will give or keep back the thing we desire, just in proportion as its possession or its loss will be most for our higher advantage ; happy to be able to listen to those beautiful exhortations of Scripture as whispered into our own ear by the voice of a Covenant Love, and in filial simplicity to act upon them : "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;" "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart ;" "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass ;" "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee." Thus to

feel and thus to act, is to have the trust in God which can make us, in the Psalmist's language, "as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." There are those who can bear witness that this trust has in times past calmed their anxieties and resolved their perplexities, enabling them to rise above the turmoil of the heart's care, to look through the perplexing circumstances that lay before them, and, as they saw the calmer region beyond, into which their faith told them God would lead them, to feel undisturbed and at peace, unshaken from their standing-ground of confidence in their Father's wisdom and goodness. If such be your case, let the experience of the past be carried to the account of the future. The part of life before you, be it long or short, will have its new emergencies, its hours of unknown care, its moments of fresh perplexity. Keep fast hold upon God, leaving Him to guide your way, to appoint your lot, to determine the bounds of your habitation. So you will not

lose that priceless possession,—rest of heart, through an ever changing life.

II. The same may be said of trust in God in contemplation of the world's strange mysteries. What if there are problems in the world about us which we cannot solve! What if the presence of evil in God's creation be inexplicable, and wickedness is seen to be rampant! What if earth's future looks dark to outward eye, and each hope that men form of its coming state seems to rise up only to be cast down by the stern realities of its developing history! What if there seems to be no standing-ground for men's opinions, as if their minds were left to float about on a sea of uncertainty, and as if each diver into the depths of that sea only brought up thence relics of the wrecks of the past! No doubt all this is often the source of real difficulty to a thoughtful mind, and brings disquietude into many a heart; but surely if we have ever pierced to the eternal throne, as the light of Christ's redemption has exhibited

it to man's view, the wondrous aspect of the Divine character there displayed will make us accept with a calm, unquestioning heart, His unexplained dealings in our earth. We shall feel that we can safely leave His own world, which He has loved and redeemed, in His hands. Whatever shadows may be cast over the world, by dark objects that rise between it and God, we may rest in this thought,—that the light which shines behind, and causes the shadows to fall, comes from the glory of Him who "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all."

III. Lastly, this same trust in God will enable us to stand unmoved when we think of our own coming immortality. Why is it that in anxious fear we have sometimes trembled at the prospect before us,—trembled lest an opening world should dissipate all our hope, and spread before us only the doom of the self-deceived? Why is it that in moments when our faith has been put to the test, the hope

that seemed to do very well in easy-going life quailed before the supposed approval of eternity, and lost its anchorage in the rising storm ? Ah, it is because not clearly and firmly has our faith been anchored on the love of God in Christ ; it is because we have not gone straight to His mercy-seat, and without a misgiving as to His faithfulness and the efficacy of the finished work, laid at His feet all that concerns our souls. Let us do this : let us with implicit confidence leave our destiny for eternity in His hands, on the ground that He Himself has commanded us to do so,—“Look unto Me, and be saved ;” and not readily will our hearts be shaken from the rock of their hope. For then, though we may be painfully conscious of moral weakness, we can point to the Mighty One, and say, “I know whom I have believed.” In days of sorrow, or in the breaking down of helpless mortality, our faith will look straight to the Author of the perfect Redemption, and will see the hoped-for salvation depending on His

work, His promise, His faithfulness ; and if the work, the promise, the faithfulness of Emmanuel are sure and abiding, then will the faith that rests on them be safe and unshaken : eternity will not move it from its firm foundation. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."

VI.

GOD MANIFESTING HIMSELF IN SORROW.

*"She called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God Seest me."**—GEN. xvi. 13.

IN the few particulars given us of Abraham's young Egyptian slave, we have some beautiful outline sketches of God's discipline through sorrows and injuries: a discipline that led her, by that which was Abraham's sin, up to the chastened, trusting state of a child of God.

We know nothing of Hagar's early history; we may guess, however, that it was when Abraham and his wife visited Egypt during the famine in Canaan, that they took her to be their servant, and brought her back with them to

* Literally: "Thou art a God of vision."

their former settlement. A fatal moment, shall we say it was, when thus her destiny began to be connected with that of the patriarchal family? Sorrow and bitterness indeed began to be treasured up in that moment for the years to come. Thence was to spring a disturbing of the peace of the patriarch's home, and trouble in after generations to the chosen heirs of Abraham. But towards Hagar herself a gentle purpose lay concealed,—the purpose of the God who sees the end from the beginning, and who would make the winding, intricate path that lay before the poor slave-girl, all chequered as it was to be with light and shadow, to end in the revelation to her of a watchful, all-seeing eye. In the land of her birth there reigned the gloom of heathenism. It was indeed at that time the first of countries: there civilization had its home; and Egypt's skilled workmen were even then setting up the monumental wonders that stand to this hour, or applying their delicate craft to the con-

struction of those minuter works of art which modern searchers have found in her tombs and cavern-temples. But with all her civilization, and with all her glory, Egypt had no true faith to give her children. No sweet tale was told in the ear of an Egyptian child of a Creator's love, of His willingness to pardon, His power to save. That land was wholly given to idolatry. The river that made it fertile, each object in nature, the very beasts of the earth, were worshiped as deities. In Egypt, perhaps more than in any other land, the creature was served and reverenced more than the Creator. Amid all this idolatry, I suppose, Hagar's youth was spent. None had taught her infant lips to lisp the name of God. Her young hands had not been clasped in prayer to an unseen Father. Hers was a childhood without God.

How awful to think how many a childhood has had this character, in lands where no light of Divine knowledge has shone,—a childhood

which has ripened into a youth whose aspirations have never found the glorious aim towards which they yearn ; while that youth again has merged into a manhood which has spent itself on purposeless work, and has come to its dark close full of trembling wants, but with no hope to satisfy its cravings.

In Hagar's case there was a Divine mercy that sought her out, and came to call her from her heathenism. In Abraham's household there was just then to be found what might be called the visible Church of God on earth. It was there that the messages of God were heard ; it was there that the treasure of heavenly truth was preserved. When the Egyptian slave was made a member of that household, it was as if she had received a kind of *baptism*,—an outward initiation into the Church of God. There she had the privilege of hearing of the God that made the heaven and the earth, of His care over His creatures, of the special favour which He had shown to her master,

and of the promises He had made to his family in ages to come. There she had the beautiful example of her master's faith. There, as she saw him kneeling beside his smoking altar, she had hints given her of sin's atonement, of God forgiving through sacrifice. But these were only the preliminary steps by which she was to be trained to the full personal knowledge of her God. It wanted something more than the mere outward teaching to bring her to this: there had yet to come the stern discipline, the bringing home to her personally the teaching of heaven. In due time that hard but effective discipline was sent. It came first under the guise of a seemingly dazzling prosperity. According to ideas then prevalent, the mistress surrenders to her slave the privileges of a wife. Raised suddenly to equality with her mistress, what wonder if the young servant is elated at her new position? "Her mistress was despised in her eyes." But now comes the turn in the giddy dream. Jealousy once

wakened in her on whose side was the power, finds its exercise in acts of cruel oppression. Now better would it have been for the poor slave if she had never been elevated to her false position of dignity, if still she were Sarah's humble maid! It must have been in a moment of deep bitterness that she came to her last resolve,—to fly from the home where she had so long lived in happiness; to fly she knew not whither, to any hiding-place from her mistress's cruel wrath.

She has acted on her resolve: she has fled in the direction of the land of her childhood. Perhaps she has thought that it would be but a little way to her native Egypt. Poor innocent wanderer! the long, dreary journey she has already come is but a small portion of the whole distance. Miles and miles of the great wilderness lie between her and her native land. What shall she do? Weary and footsore, she can only sit down and weep by the road-side well. What an hour of dismay to her distracted

heart! Thoughts of the past rise up: her early heathen home, the first coming to the adopted home of her womanhood, the happy hours spent in unpretending service, her recent exaltation to the position of wife, the folly of her own pride that had roused Sarah's jealousy: how vivid everything looks! Then, her present position: an outcast amid nature's wild scenery, with all the unknown perils of solitude lurking around her: how the thought of it makes her shudder! And the future,—so utterly blank, and with a woman's time of trial before her,—she dares not think of it! But hark: there is a rush of wings; and a voice of silvery gentleness speaks her name. "Hagar, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?" Will she fly, startled and terrified by the sudden vision? Ah, no! Something tells her that there is comfort on the lips of the angel-stranger. He is a messenger from Abraham's God. Just in the moment of her deepest anguish, he has come to tell her of the Eye, which unknown to her,

has ever been over her, which pitied her in the heathenism of her childhood, which had watched above her ever since, which is upon her in kindness and compassion now in the solitude of the wilderness. "Return to thy mistress," is the command given to her; and to the command is added an encouraging promise of future prosperity. How happy, in a moment of despair about the future, to have one's path marked out by God Himself! Hagar's anguish now is gone. Her course is clear; there is God's call, and God's promise, to guide her. But beyond the removal of her present sorrow, there has come to her another blessing: God has revealed Himself to her. By the traveller's well in the wilderness, she has come to know that the eye of the Almighty is upon her. She had heard of Him before by the hearing of the ear; she had heard her master speak of Him; she had watched the smoke curling up from altars dedicated to Him: but now she feels that He is close beside her. He has come to her in her

sorrow ; He has shown her that He has known every pang that has been rending her heart, that He has been pitying her affliction when she was all unconscious of His love. Now will she lift up her voice in praises to Him and cry, "Thou, God, seest me." Henceforth, how sacred shall be that well beside which she found her God ! Often will she visit it to stir up thoughts of gratitude. It shall be a monument to her of heaven's goodness. It shall be known by a special name,—a name that shall be precious for evermore, בָּאֵר לְחֵזֶן רַאֲי "The well of the Living One who sees me."

To such an end, to such a realizing of the presence of the all-seeing God, perhaps the reader of these pages is being led. The path too which is bringing you there may be similar to that which brought Hagar to the recognition of her God. For Hagar's state in the darkness of her Egyptian home, has a counterpart in the native condition of us all ; and our early baptism, which placed us within range of the holy

influences of Christ's Gospel, was to us what to her was the introduction into the patriarchal household. You know, my brother and sister, whether holy truths for a long time were proclaimed in your hearing, and divine lessons were pressed upon you, while you continued unmoved as to the great question between God and you. As you look back, perhaps you are now conscious that you were then led by God's guiding hand through another stage. The general teaching which had proved ineffective to you, was set aside, and there was substituted for it the harder, the more home discipline: you were made to feel the want of blessings, to the offer of which you had but listlessly hearkened before. That was the meaning of the misery into which Hagar sank: of her being suddenly lifted up and then suffered to fall so heavily. Dark indeed would the providence seem that drives the sad oppressed one to such a climax of agony as her's by the well of the desert, if there were no angel of mercy waiting with a Father's message. You

thought it strange and hard, I daresay, that prospects on which you had calculated should have been dissipated like the traveller's vision of cities and lakes in the desert, or that some single circumstance should have been suffered to mar the pleasure of life, and to be to you as a heavy burden perpetually hanging about your heart. May the meaning of all this be made clear to you! May you hear the same angel-voice that drove away Hagar's misery, saying to you as to her, when your way is hedged up and you have cast yourself down in the wilderness to mourn in hopelessness, "The Lord hath heard thy affliction." Then will a new sense seem to be wakened in you, as the truth bursts upon you towards which God has all along been leading you. "Thou, God, seest me," will be your earliest exclamation: "Thou, as a watchful Father, hast continually been near me, while I thought Thee far away. Thou didst see me, blessed Redeemer, when in thy dying agony Thou didst feel the wounds

inflicted by my individual sin ; Thou hast seen me, glorious Mediator, when I thought not of thine intercessions, and hast pleaded for me that I might not perish : Thou didst see me wandering as a lost sheep in the paths of ruin, and didst send forth thy grace to stop me, and by severe mercies to compel me to turn back to thy fold. And now Thou seest me, a helpless penitent at thy feet, whose hope rests only on thy power to save. I know Thou wilt not turn thy gaze away from me. Thou seest all my sin ; but dost Thou not see it with a Redeemer's eye ? Wilt Thou not see also the 'travail of thy soul' passed through once for that sin of mine,—and, seeing it, be satisfied ? ”

VII.

THE DISAPPOINTED PRAYER.

"The Lord would not hear me."—DEUT. iii. 26.

IT was a moment of exultation for Israel. The wilderness of their wanderings was now behind them ; and in front of them they could see, sparkling in the light of the evening sun, the only barrier that lay between them and their home,—the Jordan, winding its way through the plains of Moab. We can imagine the excitement and joy of that hour ; when, as the multitudes saw the hills of the Holy Land rising up against the Western sky, they began to realize that their eyes were gazing on the very scenes of their forefathers' sojournings, and on what were to be the scenes of their own future history. Aye, there it was, among those vine-clad hills, that they, whose revered names

stood at the head of their families, and of whose deeds and sayings each Hebrew child had heard on his parent's knee, spread their tents and built their altars. There it was that lay the home of their race's birthright; and now the time was just near when the long cherished hope was to be fulfilled, that each man should rest under his vine and under his fig-tree, in a land that he could call his own,—his own, on a higher principle than that of ordinary national dominion,—his own, by the promise of his fathers' God.

Who amongst those hosts would more enter into the enthusiasm of feelings such as these, as he looked across the waters of the Jordan towards the home of the Lord's people, than he who had at first taken to that people God's promise of deliverance, and had now brought them to the very borders of their place of rest? To him the old associations of that land were familiar, for his pen has given us the history of the patriarchal world. He knew well by

name each spot where the fathers had lived and prayed and died ; and often he must have pictured to himself the scenery, in the midst of which the events he narrated took place. Can we wonder if in Moses' breast the desire was strong and eager to tread the land in which his thoughts had so often dwelt ? Can we wonder that when he had undergone all the toil of the probation, when on him had pressed, perhaps more heavily than on any one of his people, the burden of those forty years, he should partake of their eagerness to go over the last barrier, and to possess the good land ?

But, alas, the word had gone forth from the mouth of Jehovah, "Thou shalt not go in thither." Moses' one sin beside the rock in Kadesh had sealed the sad blighting of his hopes. He was living among the ardent anticipations of his people, and could hear them speak to one another with a glow of joy, of the near approach of their entrance into the happy land. But he knew that he himself might not

partake of those anticipations, nor feel a touch of that glow of joy: yet it would seem when the last moment came, when the shout of Israel's rejoicing was heard from the banks of the Jordan, that Moses, in the ardour of his desire to pass over that last boundary, even began to hope that God might relax His severity, and that He who had declared Himself a gracious and forgiving God, might, with the forgiveness of the sin, grant also a remission of its threatened penalty. Accordingly, while the busy preparations were going on in the camp, for the event which was stirring up all the warm joy of each Hebrew heart, he went into the presence of his God, and pleaded for a lightening of his heavy sentence; pleaded that this one earthly wish of his heart might be fulfilled; that this one natural reward might be granted for all his labour and endurance in the service of the Lord's people. "O Lord God," he cried, "Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy mighty hand; for

what god is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to Thy works and according to Thy might? I pray Thee let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain" (the southern, or more prominent heights, according to some; or simply in description of the land, "that goodly mountain region"), "and Lebanon."

"Thou hast *begun* to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy mighty hand." Moses rightly felt that all those wondrous deeds of Divine power,—the plagues that wrung from the tyrant freedom for his captives, the rolling back of the waters, the tables spread in the desert, the barren rocks turned into fountains of water,—that all these were but the *beginning* of the marvels that God would do for Israel; the type and pledge of those manifestations of power in connection with the chosen race, which should bear witness for God before a startled world from generation to generation, even to the end of the history of time. A far-reaching faith

thus marked the suppliant's approach to his God.

And the prayer itself,—how urgent, how sure (we might almost have said) to bring down a favourable answer from God ! It was the prayer of the stricken child, willing to confess his sin, acknowledging the Father's right to punish, and yet appealing to the gentleness of the Parent's heart ; pleading past kindnesses as a reason for the granting of his wish. "Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy mighty hand. I pray Thee let me go over."

Is He that sitteth in heaven the Hearer of prayer ? Does He say to each one that looks to Him, "Call upon Me, and I will answer thee" ? Then surely there could be but one result. The Father's heart could not resist such a cry, such a pleading on the part of His child. But how strangely comes the sequel : "The Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me!" There is very solemn teaching in those words, "He would not hear." There was

kneeling in the presence of the Almighty one of the holiest of men ; one who had given himself up in life-long devotion to God ; one of whom Jehovah had said, "With him will I speak mouth to mouth, and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold." This suppliant was asking no unreasonable favour ; no mere selfish, worldly boon. He was earnestly praying that whereas he had been mixed up in God's earlier acts of grace towards Israel, he might be permitted to see the development of them. But the result of the prayer was only this : "God would not hear." Why this result ? It was the fruit of *a single sin*. The sin was forgiven, but it was not forgotten by God. His own immutable law had fixed upon the sin a certain sequel ; and when the petition of him who committed the sin, clashed with the decree of that law, not mercy, however deep, however infinite, could make the Just and Unchanging One lend an ear even to the earnest prayer of His faithful child. None but this could be the

message brought from heaven relative to the reception there of the petition : " God would not hear."

Is there not suggested here a reason for some of our bitter disappointments ? Why was it, reader, that your long cherished hope was so cruelly blighted ? Why was it, when you had lived with the pleasing vision before you, and each day that passed seemed to reflect a glow from the bright period that you hoped was awaiting you,—why was it, that a moment came when you looked into the future and the vision was no longer there ? It was not that the object of your hope was not a legitimate one. Nor did you seek it independently of God. You prayed for it earnestly. It may be, that if ever a warm and eager petition went up from your heart to the throne of God, it was that this wish of your heart might be granted. Yet the withering of your hope seemed plainly to write upon the face of heaven, as you looked upwards with your last supplication on your lips, " God would

not hear." Have you sought and found the *cause*? If not, go back among the scenes of the past. Let memory make diligent search among the deeds of by-gone days. Let her take down again the shelved records of your actions. Let her open the registers in which are entered the time and the circumstances and the degree of guilt, of each one of your transgressions. Are you quite sure, that among those dark memorials there may not be found just *one sin* that accounts for the blighting of your hope, the denial of your prayer? It was not that God had set aside His character as the Listener to prayer; it was not that He arbitrarily spurned your request: but that one sin made the granting your petition an impossibility. The consequences of it, in the very moment of its commission, were registered by the law of God's eternal justice in deep cut letters on tablets that never can be broken. The sin itself may have been pardoned. You may have taken it to the Saviour, and have by faith realised that

His sacrifice has silenced its condemning voice against the day of your appearing before the bar of God. But its *earthly* consequences, the furrow that it leaves behind it on the surface of your life, must abide still; and the tears of disappointment that you are shedding now, may be found to have their real source in that deed of the dim past.

The record of the pleading of Moses with God was not finished when he tells us, "The Lord was wroth with me, and would not hear me." In almost every such manifestation of the severity of a just God, of His strict dealing with even His people's sin, there shows itself something of the other side of His character. Will His children, as they read of the futility of even Moses' supplication, begin to have their confidence shaken in the goodness of their Father? Then the very mode in which that supplication was refused, shall restore their confidence and reveal the mercy that underlies the justice. Moses would have had no right to

complain, if as the words of his request died away, heaven had been silent, and no voice had come from the mercy-seat in response to his cry. Yet see the attitude which a gracious God assumes towards him. He stoops to become Himself a pleader with the suppliant. He even beseeches him to lay down the weapons of his earnestness, and not to attempt to storm the citadel of a Father's love. "The Lord said, Let it suffice thee: speak no more unto me of this matter." Then in order to smooth down the refusal, a boon is granted, a kind of partial fulfilment of the lawgiver's wish. "Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold the land with thine eyes; for thou shalt not go over Jordan." And from that height among the mountains of Moab he surveyed the land on which he was not to tread. It were vain to guess the feelings that burned in the breast of the aged beholder of that prospect. It may be that there were pro-

thetic thoughts of the days to come, and that the events of the future passed in review before him, as his eye rested on the scenes where they were to be enacted. It may be, that in what was then revealed to him he saw far more than if he had gone with Israel's hosts to march through the land of promise. We cannot tell. But this we know, that in the lofty mountain solitude the summons came to him to enter a more blessed rest than Israel's. Oh, at that moment when he heard the call to depart, must not the very rejection of his recent prayer have been a witness to him, that God had a higher reward in store for him after his long toils in the Lord's service, than a mere entrance into Canaan! As the breath of the heavenly land seemed to fan his spirit, and the mountains of Palestine began to fade away before the opening vision of the everlasting hills, would there be any repining at that moment that his prayer had not been granted? Could there be, think you, one lingering wish to exchange portions

with those whom he had left in the plains below preparing for the river's passage?

So then, in the end, all was well. The sin remembered and unsparingly punished, the wish denied, the prayer rejected, the bitter disappointment, all melted away amid the welcomes of the upper world that greeted the spirit of this servant of God, as from the silence and solitude of the mountain top it entered the land of eternal rest.

Read here a lesson of higher trust in God. Though our fondest wishes may be disappointed, though our prayers may be unanswered, though God may seem to set Himself in opposition to our deepest hopes and aspirations,—yet let us not forsake our confidence in His love. If in faithfulness and earnestness our hearts are given to Him, let us not fear to rely upon that charter of His people's assurance in days of darkness, "All things work together for good to them that love God." The hand on which we have taken hold will guide us along a right way. The

Shepherd, on whose shoulders we have suffered ourselves to be laid, will bring us by the safest path. The guiding star that we have set ourselves to follow, though it pass by many a tempting palace, will come and stand over the best home of our spirits; even over the place where the Saviour is to be found. And there shall come a time when we shall ourselves recognize and rejoice in this safe and faithful guiding of our God; when, like Moses on Moab's mountains, we shall see each object of our disappointed hopes beneath our feet; but around us and above us, visions dawning upon us of "the rest that remaineth for the people of God."

VIII.

GOD'S FETTERED WORKMAN.

"When we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him."—ACTS xxviii. 16.

SOME lessons taught by a glance into the inside of a prison are to form the subject of our present chapter. Many such a lesson we have before now noted, in what we have read or heard of relating to the dark abode where the guilty one is left to be chastised by the whip of conscience. The diaries of a Howard or a Fry, the tales that most of us have heard of what goes on within those gloomy walls, have given us very fearful and very solemn revelations of the effect that sin has upon human souls, and of the awfulness of that moral abyss into which

Satan tries to drag his captives. There, in the criminal cell, it seems to have sometimes been shown that there is a boundary across which a man may pass even in this life, when he gets through habitual sin beyond the power of softening influences, when the hope seems to have vanished of bringing him to repentance, and Satan seems to have riveted his chains so firmly around his victim as to hold him bound irretrievably for the everlasting dungeon. But there also, in that same cell, there has at times been shown a token that heaven's power is mightier than hell's, that grace can triumph over guilt, and that when the strong and armed one has been holding in his grip some poor soul that seemed hopelessly doomed, a stronger One than he can come upon him and set the captive free.

But it is a very different prison scene that we are to look at now. True, there is the same absence from freedom, the same rattling chain, the same stern jailor watching over his captive.

But the prisoner here is no criminal. No bitter remorse is racking his heart; no spectres of dark deeds that have brought him there are rising up to scare him, and to bring forebodings of a yet more awful future. It is Christ's martyr! It is Christ's noble soldier, suffering in his Master's cause; his very chain part of the uniform of his King, the jailors that watch him, a body-guard of honour that proclaim him a distinguished warrior in Heaven's service. It is into the prison of St. Paul that we are going to look, when after the perilous voyage narrated in Acts xxvii., he was kept in confinement in the head-quarters of the empire for two years, awaiting (according to the injustice of those days in which no "Habeas Corpus Act" was known) his trial at the Emperor's tribunal. What the termination of his long captivity was, whether his trial ever came off, or whether he was simply released by the arbitrary will of the Emperor, we have no records to tell us. The book of the Acts closes somewhat abruptly,

without informing us on this point. But from the last chapter of that book, and from the several Epistles which the Apostle wrote during his captivity at Rome, we gather many particulars, which make a glance at his prison life a most profitable and deeply interesting task.

It will be remembered that through the kindness of the Praetorian Prefect, to whom the care of prisoners meant for the imperial tribunal was committed, Paul's captivity was made much less severe than it might have been, and that he was allowed to inhabit a lodging of his own. Still he was a captive; and according to the Roman custom, he was chained constantly, by day and by night, to some soldier out of a band of Praetorians who took it by turn thus to keep guard over their prisoner.

Now during all this time, was there a blank in the history of the great Apostle's work? What a pity, we might think, that so useful and so mighty a champion for Christ should be laid by; that so long a period of seemingly

wasted time should be allowed by God to pass, when the world was crying out in the depth of its need for the messengers of the Gospel, for every voice that could tell the blessed story of salvation, for every hand that knew how to apply the healing balm of Calvary! So we think. But Paul in his prison tells us this lesson,—that whatever our circumstances are, however seemingly cut off from opportunities of usefulness, God can make use of us, and we can really be doing valuable service for Him.

Bound though he was, to use his own language, "the word of God was not bound." That prison, from the very first, became the sacred centre from which light shone forth to many a soul. The prisoner was no idler, even now, in the glorious work to which he had given himself in his days of freedom. Only three days had elapsed, when he summoned (as he was allowed to do) an assembly of the Jews in Rome, and explained to them, in an address which St. Luke gives, the grounds on which he

was suffering persecution from their brethren in Judea : and having fixed a day, invited them to come and learn more particulars about that "hope of Israel" for which, said he, "I am bound with this chain." Many came : and from morning till evening, with untiring patience and self-devotion, he listened to the difficulties of inquirers, or answered the objections of the incredulous. It was, too, not of Jews only, but I imagine of all inhabitants of the great Imperial city, that St. Luke says, "Paul received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." Could God find no work for His servant to do, because men had fettered his limbs and placed him under a jailor's eye ? Ah, see how that Divine hand that knows no frustrating of its purposes, can bring the work for the workman to do even into the prison's walls ! When no familiar Apostle's voice is heard in the cities of Asia pleading with men

to turn to the living God, the slave of Colosse is led by an all-unsuspected Providence, in his flight from his master, to the world's crowded metropolis, to the neighbourhood of the Praetorian barracks, and then to the lodging of the captive Apostle. There, strangely finding himself face to face with his master Philemon's old guest, riveted to the spot by the searching eye of the preacher, who seems to gaze at him as if he had found him out in all his sin,—pierced to the heart by the words that come to him like arrows from the bow of his neglected God, he comes forward, and at Paul's feet tells all. And soon the Apostle can write of him to his master, as "my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds; not now a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved." Who knows how many another case there may have been of poor heathen hearts wakened to life and to holiness by those prison-preachings,—wanderers from the provinces, or foreigners from distant lands, or residents in the city itself! I think there must

have been some among those soldiers who took it in turn to be chained to St. Paul as his keeper, to whom so close a contact with God's noble servant brought a softening of heart, a willingness to enlist in the armies of Jesus. For, to be chained to the Apostle Paul, how great a privilege! to be beside him not only when he is uttering his impassioned pleadings to the assembled congregation, but when he is writing down the glowing thoughts of his silent moments! to be with him when his thoughts are rising heaven-ward, when his own expressed sentiment is lifting him above the scenes of earth, "Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" to be alone with him in his sorrows, and in his joys! to be alone with him in his *prayers*, when he is pouring out his heart to that Jesus whose love is his constraining motive, and when a light is kindling up his care-worn face, like that which shone once around him in the mid-day vision! Oh,

who could resist an influence like this? Alas, it is possible it may have been resisted; for was there not one, who was accustomed to walk beside a holier and a nobler than Paul, who daily heard His voice and ate with Him from the same dish, yet who took from His enemies the price of His blood, and betrayed his Master with a kiss? Yes, there may have been some of those fierce men, who were accustomed to live in an atmosphere of brutality and violence, whose hearts were steeled against even an influence like that of their Christian captive. But I cannot think it could have been so with all. *Some* must have yielded to the power of that heaven-breathing presence. And perhaps we may gather a hint that it was indeed so, from a remark which he himself makes in one of the letters that he wrote during this period of imprisonment: "I would that ye should understand, brethren [he says to the Philippians], that the things which have happened to me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel,

so that my bonds in Christ are manifest throughout the whole Prætorium :" *i.e.*, the quarters of the Prætorian soldiers.

Thus doubtless was God working, by the hands of His fettered servant, on many souls in Rome ; but, all the while, a wider work still was being done. True, the Churches planted by St. Paul had to go without the comfort and confirmation of his visits. They could not, as the Galatian Church had done, receive him as an angel of God, and testify in his presence their love, as the love of children to a father. No happy gatherings could there be, like that of the Sabbath evening at Troas, when the little band of Christians gathered out of a heathen city, spent the night in sweet communion with him and with Jesus, in the breaking of bread till morning light. But what then ? Did not those Churches, thus deprived of the presence of their beloved teacher, gain ? has not the whole Church of God, in every age, gained thereby ? Had not they, and have

not we, more abiding fountains of apostolic comfort and guidance in the Epistles which he wrote from the Roman prison,—that to his specially-loved Philippians, those to the Colossians, and to Philemon ; and that circular Epistle, of which the particular copy addressed to the Ephesians seems to have been most sedulously preserved and handed down ? Thus did God provide materials for His workman, when that workman's chained hand might seem to have no power to fulfil its task ; and doubtless, when again the Apostle breathed the air of liberty, and he was preaching among the tribes of Spain, he felt that the work of those two years of captivity was not the least important of all the toil of his chequered life.

Then, I repeat, we have a lesson here to this effect : that however untoward and unpromising our position may be, we can still do work for God ; that, be our circumstances what they may, no portion of our life need be a wasted time. We are very apt to take an artificial

view of work for God. We think of it as if it were only of a *clerical* kind ; as if it consisted only of preaching, and of direct religious teaching. But though the evangelist's and the pastor's work is a glorious one, it is by no means the only kind of employment at which God sets His workmen. The Hand that unseen moves the mainsprings of the world, often employs instrumentalities as silent and as invisible as its own. That kingdom of God which "cometh not with observation," can be advanced and enlarged by agencies that work not with observation. And so the little child can have its share in the mighty work ; for "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God ordains strength." And the man in active business can have his share in it, when he imports into the conduct of his daily calling the high principles and the upright motives of a genuine Christian, and when he lets it be seen by all that his heart is where his treasure is, and that *that* treasure is in heaven. Yes, and

the poor sickly sufferer, who seems to have no power to do anything either for God or man, may feel that he too has his place among the labourers at God's building. He may have a silent influence on others that he little suspects. There may be a peculiar honour attaching to him, as one of those to whom "it is *given* (as a special gift and favour) in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake;" and who can tell whether he, whose task on earth has been suffering rather than working, may not, by this very discipline, be prepared for work of a higher order in the world to come, and become one of the skilled workmen of heaven,—one of those who shall be employed in those nobler departments of work which shall still go on when the little ministries of earth shall all have ceased?

We must not part with St. Paul in his prison without learning one other lesson. What was it that made him resigned to his captivity, that made him content to work or to suffer, to live

or to die? In the letter which he wrote at this time to his favourite Church of Philippi, he himself gives us an answer. "According to my earnest expectation and my hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, *Christ shall be magnified in my body*, whether it be by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." This it was, that reconciled him to his captivity; this it was that made him content to work or suffer, to live or die: he knew that Christ was using him for His own glory, that *He* was being magnified in him.

And shall not this same thought, dear reader, help you to rest in calm contentment with every portion God appoints you? Is it for us to complain of our station in life, or of our sphere of work? Is it for us to say how much better it would be if our station were higher, or our sphere of labour wider? Why disquiet ourselves with questions like these? One thought alone is enough for us, if we are God's true

children ; and in that thought let us find rest for every perplexing care : "I am in my Saviour's hands. He is using me in His mighty wisdom for His own glory. And His blessed purpose concerning me shall be fulfilled. He shall be magnified in me, whether by life or by death."

IX.

THE HEART'S HOME.

*"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High,
shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."—
PSALM xcii. 1.*

THERE is a word which is always dear to an Englishman: and that word is, *home*. If there is one person more than another for whom we feel pity, one whose lot seems to us more sad than that of others, it is the homeless. If a poor man has only the very humblest cottage, a mere tenement with scarcely any appendages of comfort, where he and his family can live together, we should think him better off, a far happier man, than the wanderer over the face of the earth; who, though perhaps in better circumstances, had no spot to which he could feel bound by the ties of love and

kindred, and which he could call by the sacred title of home. How the English sailor in southern seas looks out by night towards the constellations of the northern sky, and thinks of the land over which those stars are shining, and of one spot in it, which is dearer to him than the lands of tropic beauty he has passed and the gorgeous cities at which he has touched! How the soldier, as he lies under the open sky before the fortress' walls, in his half slumber, ready for the alarm of the night-attack, dreams of the village where his boyhood was spent, and of *her* whose midnight prayer is even at that moment going up on his behalf to the Giver and Preserver of life! I do not know whether one of the spurs of English courage, one of the springs of English endurance, is not the thought and the love of home.

But I ask, is not our pity claimed, even more than for the houseless wanderer, for the *homeless heart*?

A homeless heart! There is such a thing:

aye, around us on every side there are such objects of a Christian's pity. The heart that in the midst of its daily cares and anxieties has no unseen region where it can find rest, that in the moments of its cessation from worldly work and thought can only take uneasy repose amid the din of its own busy occupations,—like the workman who for want of a better lodging lies down to sleep in the engine-room, surrounded by the noise of the machinery at which he has been working,—the heart that can point to no heavenly mansion and say of it, "My Father dwells there," the heart that has no hope, when the war of life is finished, when the voyage upon its ocean is done, of going to an abode of peace, whence the toils and terrors of the battle-field and the dangers of the ocean-wanderings can be looked back upon as only enhancing the sweetness of the after-repose,—that heart I call a homeless one. When you hear, as alas we do from time to time from our newspapers, of one the purity of whose youth

has been marred, whose young hopes have all withered and died away in the blighting atmosphere of guilt, coming in her sadness and misery to seek the only remedy that despair knows of from the wretchedness of sin in the dreadful resource of suicide,—there you have a mournful instance of a homeless heart. When you see one to whom God has apportioned a lot of trial, but who knows not and seeks not, amid life's vexations and perplexities, the consolations that are with God, trying to crush the sense of pain and the thought of care in the miserable stupefaction of drunkenness, or in the less gross but perhaps scarcely less guilty habit of opium-taking,—there again you have an instance of a homeless heart. And wherever there is found one whose occupations, whose joys, whose friendships, are all of this world, whose life in the flesh is the only life he is living, one who has never learnt to cherish the words whose sweet echo Jesus left behind Him, "In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a

place for you,"—in that man too is afforded an instance of a homeless heart.

God's Word brings us the message that there is a home for every heart that wants one, and gives a beautiful and blessed promise to those who choose that home as the dwelling-place of their souls: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

We learn here what is the true home of man's heart: "the secret place of the Most High." The first feature which the description suggests is, that it is a place belonging to God,—a place where He dwells. It is this that makes it just what we all want. No resting-place will do for us from which our Creator and Lord is absent. Perhaps we are not conscious of it, but I believe the thing that man most dreads and shirks from, is a state such as may be described in two words, "without God." I believe if all the vague fears that we feel, all our inward tremblings and forebodings that darken the soul in

its moments of depression, were analyzed, they would be found all pointing, like the shrivelled fingers of dim spectres seen in the night's dream, to a condition the most terrible that man can conceive or endure: a condition where God is not; where all is without form and void, and darkness is on the face of the deep, because no presence is there of Him who is the source of life and light and joy. The home of which Revelation tells us is just the opposite to this. It is "the place of the Most High:" the place where He has built His palace, the universe's royal city, upon which shines the never-setting sun of "the light of His countenance." It is a "secret place;" because it is hidden from mortal eye, because crowds of worldlings pass it by and never discover it, and it is only seen when the finger of heavenly teaching points it out to the eye of faith.

Do you ask, "Where is this secret place of the Most High? Shall we ascend into heaven and seek it in some realm far away? Can they

only behold it and dwell in it, who have departed from this earth and gone to the habitations of eternity ?” Nay : there are to be found on this earth, amongst us living men, inhabitants of “the secret place of the Most High.” They who live near to God, who, at morning hour, as they rise from their beds, look up naturally to their Father’s mercy-seat, waiting to receive His commission at the outset of the day’s work ; who, while the noise of business is around them, still discern a heavenly voice, as the sailor hears in the midst of the storm his captain’s word of command ; who, even when life looks brightest, and summer is upon the face of earthly things, can say in no gloomy spirit, but with the smile of a hope full of immortality, “The fashion of this world passeth away ;” who at night fear not to trust themselves to sleep’s state of unconsciousness, because they feel that He who never sleepeth nor slumbereth is their Friend and Guardian ; who, in troublous hours, can feel at peace because the Saviour’s voice has told them

that "underneath are the Everlasting Arms :" such as these are among the inhabitants of "the secret place of the Most High." Call to mind what St. Paul says of those on whom the great Redemption has taken effect : "Ye, who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Afar off from what ? Made nigh to what ? The same passage gives the answer. "At that time ye were without God. But now, ye who were afar off are made nigh." Here you trace the entrance of a human heart into its true home. There was once an absence from God ; there is now an introduction into His presence under the shadow of the Mediator's merits. Once the soul dwelt apart, like the leper without the camp ; now it is brought within the boundaries of the sanctuary ; it beholds God in His temple. See again in what glowing language the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of this drawing near of the heart to take up its abode with God : "Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly

Jerusalem, and to countless hosts, even to the festive assembly of angels, and to the Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven ; and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new Covenant." Those words were not spoken to those who were just leaving this world for another. It was not the welcome addressed by happy spirits above to some who had just arrived on the shores of the eternal land of blessedness. If we were to hear the passage apart from its context, we might think this was the case. But no: it was simply addressed to the poor persecuted disciples of Jesus on earth, who were still surrounded by the common scenes of life. Then how could they be said to have come to the city of the living God, to the assembly of angels, into the presence of God Himself? Reader, may your own experience enable you to answer that question. May it teach you to say what it is for the heart to draw near to the abode of God, what it is to cross the blood-sprinkled

threshold, and to find oneself surrounded, while yet one's earthly life is going on, by the harmonies of heaven,—to feel that the hallowed atmosphere of a spiritual world is about the heart, that the soul has on the wedding-garment, the garment of joy, which Christ provides for the guests in the King's chamber, and that its praises can be joined (in anticipation of a far more glorious union of worshipping voices) with the praises of the "festive assembly of angels" and of the "spirits of just men made perfect."

It would be a long task to enumerate all the blessings resulting from taking the "secret place of the Most High" as the heart's home. This verse from the Psalms leads us to think of one particularly. There shall be to one who does so, *an abiding under the shadow of the Almighty.*

I spoke of a homeless heart. One feature in the misery of such a heart is, that it has no place of safety from the dangers which peculiarly threaten the souls of fallen men. It has

to remain all exposed, like an outcast by night, with no shelter from the rough blast, with no roof above but the black midnight sky. Misfortune comes upon such an one. The things on which he had set his heart fail him, and depart as the morning cloud ; the lights that gave an artificial brilliancy to the world, go out ; the life-belts to which he had been trusting to keep him afloat give way, and leave him sinking as in a vast ocean. Unhappy man ! He wants a shelter in this wreck of his earthly fortunes : but he has none. He has no refuge to fly to, because he has no *home*. Or death comes near,—a visitor that cannot be beckoned away. Oh, what clouds then gather round that desolate heart ! He must go, whither he knows not,—only he knows into the presence of a God from whom he has all his life kept aloof. And then will be revealed the perils of eternity : then will come the hour when the Voice will be heard which shall shake the heaven and the earth, when those terrors will become real which rose

in type before St. John at the opening of the sixth seal of the mysterious Book. Oh, how urgent will be then the need of a refuge ! How sad, in that dark emergency, to have no other resource than to call on the shivered rocks and the heaving mountains, to fall and cover the houseless one !

Now see, by way of contrast, the blessedness of having the heart's home with God. If you have such a home, you will be in happy security in every peril. Whether you have to meet losses, or to feel the pain of broken friendship, or to bear some of the countless forms of disappointment, in whatever way you may be cast among the wrecks of this world, there will be a life-boat at hand. God will be to you a portion richer than any property you may have lost, will be a better Friend to you than the friend who played you false, will set before you hopes that will never be disappointed. Moreover, in your whole path of life, in every difficulty, at every branching out of your road, in all the changes

of your earthly existence, you will be able to feel calm. You can leave your anxieties with God: He will guide you; He will make your way plain; He will turn each seeming misfortune into a means of happiness, each cross into a stepping-stone to heaven. You will be "under the shadow of the Almighty." Under that shadow you have provision made even for the hour of the last conflict. For, among the treasured purposes of heavenly love, *this* has been whispered to each trusting heart: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

And does the protection and guardian care of God over the man who dwells near to Him, stop here? Does it extend to the life and to the death of the believer, and then cease? Nay: I see a hint of the *eternity* of God's watchful love in that word "abide." Even in the world of immortality he shall have a refuge under the wings of the Eternal One. The fires of hell may

burn on for ever; the worm of the world of corruption may never die: but ever shall *he* be safe from the unquenchable fire, from the never-dying worm. The home that he chose for himself will be a lasting one. Its walls will never be shaken. Founded on the everlasting hills, it will be the perpetual refuge and shelter of the redeemed one. "He shall *abide* under the shadow of the Almighty." *

* It might at first appear that our Translators were not justified in using here a word involving the idea of permanence. The ordinary meaning of the Hebrew word is, "shall spend the night," and it is very generally used for a temporary lodging. But I think our Translators regarded the promise of this verse as extending to the evening time of man's life, when the lodging that he finds under the shadow of the Almighty will necessarily be abiding and eternal.

X.

THE COMING BRIDEGROOM.

"At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him."—MATT. XXV. 6.

THE parable of the Ten Virgins is always felt to be a difficult one to interpret. To most readers of it there seems something which clashes with promises so often repeated in other parts of Scripture, in the idea that some who up to the time of the end have been receivers of God's grace,—grace, too, which has shown itself as a burning light in the outward life,—and who are found even at last among the watchers for their Lord's coming, should be shut out finally and for ever in the outer darkness. Nor can the explanation be regarded as satisfactory, which makes the burning lamps marks of *profession* only, and the virgins whose stock of oil failed

at the last moment merely empty and worthless hypocrites. These difficulties of interpretation seem to arise from assuming that the coming of Christ here referred to is the final one : the coming to judgment. And they vanish if we rather suppose that reference is made to that advent of the Lord, pointed to in unmistakeable terms in the New Testament, which will have for its object the removal to a more glorious state, prior to the tribulations of this dispensation's last days, of the specially prepared and watchful servants of God. This coming, it is believed by a large and increasing number of Christians, will be the first step in a series of mighty events, whose climax will be found in the final crushing of the powers of evil, and the establishment on a renovated earth of Christ's kingdom of righteousness.

On this supposition the above verse gives us some hints relative to the earliest stage in the fulfilment of "the earnest expectation of the creation."

In the first place, this representation of the event intimates that it shall be at midnight, when the pall of a moral darkness shall be spread over a dreaming world, when only those will be ready for it who, by the instincts of faith, shall be specially up and awake. In this respect it would seem that prophecy is at variance with an idea not uncommonly entertained. There are many who with us profess to look for a golden age: a period such as we believe will be the ultimate result of Christ's advent. But the *instrumentality* by which the dawn of that age is to be hastened is supposed to be the development of social science, the extension of the efforts of philanthropy, the gradual enlarging of man's capacities and of his acquaintance with the laws of nature, and (many doubtless would add) the bringing to bear on the nations of the earth the civilizing influences of Christian truth. But noble as such instrumentalities are, and worthy as they are of enlisting our energies in our days of work

on earth, it would appear that not by them directly does God purpose to set up His kingdom : not, it would seem, by the increase of knowledge, nor by the diffusion of the most approved political opinions, nor by the training of the nations to act upon principles of peace and mutual forbearance, will the world be so moulded and reformed, that when He comes whom we all expect as the King of right and order and as the Prince of Peace, He will have nothing to do but to assume the sceptre which the tribute of a world's welcome shall at once accord to Him, and to reign over a race prepared for His rule. Far different from this seem to be the prophetic hints given by our coming Lord's own lips. "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth ?" is His question. Pointing back to the days of Noah and to those of Sodom, when as they revelled in thoughts and employments and pleasures which had nothing to do with God or His laws, the flash of Heaven's interference darted

on them, solemnly He utters the prophetic words, "*So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*" Is there not ground for supposing that the very progress of modern times may become so far changed, by the principles of evil ever lurking in the world, from the channel in which our sanguine wishes would see it flow, as to bring about a condition of mankind, in which vastness of power, width of knowledge, mastery over nature and almost an independence of the helps and checks of Providence, may become reasons for casting off all faith in God, for uprooting the foundations of what has been dear to His servants in every age, and for meeting the profession of the Church's hope (perhaps then but faintly heard, and uttered by only a despised and diminished band), with the taunt of arrogance: "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the foundation of the world!"

Such may not improbably constitute the mid-

night hour when the cry shall be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." It will be midnight; for the eyes of men will be closed against the realities of God's truth: it will be midnight; for Christ the Light of the world will seem to be driven from the firmament, and to have ceased to shine as the acknowledged Source of the world's life and joy: it will be midnight; for no work will be doing for God, and the sound of busy activity in promoting the Redeemer's kingdom will be hushed: it will be midnight; for then men will be living in their earthly dreams, and ignorant of the mighty events preparing to unfold themselves, will be revelling in the scenes of their own imaginings. Oh, solemn hour, when the silence of that midnight shall be broken with the cry, more terrible to faithless hearts than Egypt's cry of anguish,—"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" Startled from the sleep of unbelief, the world (if at least the coming of Christ referred to in this parable be one manifest to all) will hear it

mingling with the just uttered taunts and mockeries against the Christian's creed; and in that hour there will be laid bare before the terrified sleepers all their self-delusions, all the hollowness of the dreams that till now they had fancied were real.

I have expressed a doubt whether this advent of the Lord will be manifest to the whole world. There are certainly difficulties in supposing that such will be the case, inasmuch as subsequently iniquity is still to rear its head and to meet the judgments of heaven. It may be that silently and mysteriously God's prepared children may be taken away to meet their Lord, and that this coming of the Saviour may be as unnoticed by the generality of the world, as were His birth at Bethlehem, His resurrection, and His ascension.

We will pass over any discussion on the relative merits of these two theories, and rather dwell on this event of the future in its simple aspect, as the beginning of the process whose end is Christ's perfected kingdom.

Reverting to our Lord's description of the event as given in this parable, we notice that just on the eve of its arrival an announcement will be made of its being near at hand: a cry will be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." It is a question whether this "cry" is identical with "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God" spoken of by St. Paul, or whether the reference is to clearer declarations of the time of the end which the Church of God may be then enabled to give, or, it may be, to the voice of some Elijah "crying in the wilderness," or possibly to the "signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars," the "distress of nations," the "shaking of the powers of heaven," which (read and understood only by the watchers for the approaching King) our Lord intimates shall be the precursors of His appearance. No doubt some warning is pointed at, immediately before the event itself: something, that in the very same midnight hour within which the Lord shall come, will be the herald before His face. Yet

I fancy there are to be heard, long before that hour comes, echoes of the midnight cry. In the *twilight* of the world's great night of unbelief, even before its shadows have begun to gather round, there are ears that can catch the sound of a cry,—fainter no doubt than when the King's chariot is near, but yet speaking warnings and bringing solemn lessons of watchfulness to the Church of Christ in every age: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh."

Can we not, if we listen, hear some such cry ourselves? Independently of any particular views of historical prophecy, one cannot but feel that the events of the past, the events that lie around us, and the events into whose shadows we are coming, are moving us forward towards some crisis in earth's history. They seem like the world's struggles after freedom from manacles that still fetter it and mar its power of fulfilling its high destiny, like yearnings for the breaking of a day that shall throw light on the mysteries, the wrongs, the disorders

of this present state: upheavings of the volcanic fire beneath the surface, that is striving to find an outlet in the convulsions of the latter days. To what do the successive risings and falls of kingdoms, the struggles in each existing State for political perfection, the great popular movements that raise their voice for this or that change,—to what do these point, if not to the want of such a kingdom as the Christian looks forward to as the result of His Lord's coming: a kingdom of which changelessness as a consequence of perfection, peace, righteousness, and order, will be the characteristic element? And if indications of what the world wants, may they not also be taken as prophetic intimations of what shall be given to the world; hints that *He* will at last interfere for its good, towards Whom its unconscious yearnings are ever going forth, and will show Himself as the Redresser of its wrongs, the Satisfier of its wants? Are they not, in fact, anticipations of the midnight cry, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh”?

A voice to the same effect comes also from the Church of God. Three signs have been specially given us of the close of this dispensation : that "many shall depart from the faith," that "the love of many shall wax cold," and that "the Gospel shall be preached for a witness unto all nations." Though we may have no wish to force such prophecies into a reference to our own age, yet we may discern under-currents in the Church's present state, which seem to show that those prophecies are verging towards fulfilment. When we see among good and earnest-minded men marvellous instability of faith,—some making themselves slaves to old worn-out superstitions ; others casting off, as useless, creeds that bind together the Church of the present and the Church of the past,—when we see the one collection of the whisperings of heaven's oracle, which, if not exalted above every other written claimant to inspiration, leaves us still vainly listening for the voice from above, taken down from its proper emi-

nence and put on a par with other books,—there cannot but rise up a remembrance of the Apostle's words: "Many shall depart from the faith." Again, when around us, under the shadow of God's houses of prayer, and within the sound of continual calls to devotion, there are thousands who do not care to pray,—when among the numbers who fill our churches, many are seen whose character mocks their profession,—and when so sad a proportion of the Christian world is satisfied with systems of Formalism as representing Christ's religion,—can we repress the thought that the words of Jesus may have something to do with our day: "The love of many shall wax cold"? On the other hand, in the remarkable extension of the field over which the echoes of the Gospel proclamation is heard, whether the sound is listened to or not, in the fact that scarcely any land is now opened to commerce and research, without some effort being made to introduce there the teaching of Christian truth, we have a manifest

hastening towards the accomplishment of what is written: "The Gospel must first be published [not necessarily accepted] among all nations." We need draw no inferences from these circumstances as to times and seasons which the Father keeps in His own power; but we must feel them to be summonses to be ready for the hour on which so much hangs: echoes, these too, of the midnight cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh."

We may add, Is there not an echo of the same cry heard within the breast of us all? What is the life of each one, but a perpetual craving for something to come? In early life the child counts his birthdays, proudly watching his own progress to a higher stage. That attained, the young man looks eagerly forward to the working time of life, and glows with the hope of being something and doing something in the years before him. In the midst of manhood's full activity, still there is the same looking forward: the man of distinction ever aiming

at some higher honour, the man of wealth still anxious to add a little further accumulation to his present possessions, the man of business sighing for the day when in retired life he shall enjoy the fruits of his life's toil. Yet when the time comes when a man feels he can get no further, when the barrier of the Almighty's decree concerning his sojourn in this life stretches across his path, is there one that ever testifies that those yearnings of his childhood, his youth, his manhood, have been fully satisfied? Still they remain unsilenced as ever; and old age, as it sinks into its grave, bears witness that it must be something beyond this present state to which the longings of the heart are pointing. We are led up to the centre towards which they radiate, as we recall the fact that when the Son of God shall be fully revealed in His promised kingdom, perfect human life will begin in the new earth: life, in which our deeper hopes will be realized, and in which the ministries that shall employ us, being all for

God's glory, cannot fail to bring satisfaction to the worker. Thus these cravings of our spirits, these bendings forward to reach after something always still in front, even in hours when all that earth can give seems to have made a paradise around the heart,—are *they* not also muffled whispers of the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!"

Shall there be no prayer on our lips as we hear the sound of this cry coming to us in the stirrings of the great world, in the movements of the Church of God, in the murmurs of our own breasts? "Lord, let me not fail to bear my part in Thy new world of perfected life! Let my yearning hopes, my heart struggles find their end in Thy realm of righteousness!" But this must not be our only prayer. If the view already referred to of this parable be a correct one, there may be many subjects in Christ's final kingdom, the counterpart of the foolish virgins, whose supply of oil might be enough to show them to be God's servants in the un-

disturbed circumstances of easy-going life, but would not suffice for the emergency of the midnight hour. When in that hour the Saviour comes, it will be the *specially* prepared ones, those whose faith and earnestness have enabled them always to live as making provision for meeting their Master, for whom is reserved the privilege of being thought worthy to escape all those things that then shall be coming on the earth, and to depart with Christ out of the scenes of night. How solemnly must come home to us the personal question: Is my religious character of that high order, is my life so "hid with Christ in God," that when He shall appear, I may be able to take my stand by the Saviour's side, and "appear with Him in glory"? What if He should come suddenly, and the feeble flame of my poor faith and little love, which looked bright enough with the world's darkness around, be found "going out" when the never realized glory of Emmanuel's presence shines upon me! Ah, in

that hour shall I not see Him pass by in glorious procession, the lamps of His followers shining around Him, and their hymns of praise breaking the silence of the night? But no part shall I bear in His train: I shall but stand trembling in the distance, with my extinguished lamp and my empty vessel, with no proof that I belong to Him. And then the torches of His procession will die away as they leave me far behind, and the voices of His servants will grow fainter, till as He enters into His palace "the door is shut;" and I am left still to struggle on in the world's night, to hope on till the final morning come, in the general wakening up of the second resurrection.

Then one special prayer of ours should be, that we may always be living in full preparation for the appearance of the Son of Man. It was this preparedness which the Apostles continually made the test of higher discipleship; and it is the test, too much forgotten by the Church at large, which every Christian man in our day

ought to apply to his own profession as a bearer of Christ's name. Do we profess to look up to Him as "the Bridegroom"? Do we believe that He has espoused us unto Himself, that He has called us to be His in the bonds of the covenant of grace? Then where is our nuptial dress, where are our jewels, in which He expects us to be attired when He meets His Bride? He is sending to His Church now the message that He gave to His people of old: "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem." In the patience of such self-denying duty as God gives us strength and opportunity to perform, or, it may be, of quiet, passive suffering; in the cultivation of the Christ-like spirit of meekness and love; in learning to live through all life's anxieties in trust on a guiding Father; in cherishing each breath of the Holy Ghost upon our hearts; in striving by at least the mighty engine of prayer, if in God's providence our hands and voice be useless, to bring Heaven's healing influence to bear upon

our sin-stricken world,—we shall best be robing ourselves in the “beautiful garments” of the spouse of Jesus. Thus robed, may we be found by the Bridegroom when He comes, whether His coming be on His throne of clouds or in the silent step of death; and in the joy of His presence may we be able then to say, “My Beloved is mine, and I am His.”

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the guiding guardian love, as to be unalarmed and unconcerned at what happens. The higher he climbs, the less he feels the change, the damp vapours of the lower passes; and the higher he can but reach it, from which he looks down on the thick clouds, and the lightning and thunder storm, with the calmness of one above him.* There is an analogy to this in the spiritual life. We ought to aim, and which I have often urged for us to attain. In the lower stages of our experience we look around us, and tremble at the threatening evil, and tremble before us. We bring many requests to the Master, and anxiously urge them to his notice; and when some of them do not meet with success, we despairingly think that all is wrong with us. Always anxious

* M. Arago, in his "Meteorology," describes such a scene as witnessed from a balloon.

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